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Positioning Students in the International Intercultural Classroom: An Exploration of English Teachers' Discourse

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Abstract

The development of students' intercultural communicative competence is perceived as an integral communicative skill crucial for global interactions. To reflect this need, local and regional educational policies had included intercultural skills as a goal to be met in the English language classroom. Studies have highlighted how teachers were positioned in light of these prescriptive forces, but none have directly addressed the position of students, especially in the context of international education, which is a growing educational enterprise in Thailand. Hence, this study examines the discursive positioning of students within an international setting, as a means to explore how intercultural education is integrated. Discursive positioning of students was gleaned through interview data collected from 17 non-local English teachers working in international schools and English programs in Bangkok. In their interviews, we used the positioning framework to examine the use of pronominal markers and contextual cues as a means of understanding how students are positioned. There were four main positionings derived from our examination in which there were apparent conflicts of how students were positioned. Broadly speaking, students were positioned either as integral or restricted to the learning process. These positionings depended on various factors, such as institutional parameters, teachers' view of culture, and even students' own English language proficiency. From our findings, we recommend ways in which intercultural communicative competence may be integrated in the context of this study. For future research, it may be of value to examine other social entities relevant to a study site.

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1. Introduction

Globalization has made intercultural communicative competence (ICC) a necessary communication skill. To support the development of this skill, governmental and educational bodies worldwide incorporate ICC into English curricula. This is to bring to the classroom learning experiences that focus on the use of English in intercultural communicative situations, and to develop beliefs and responses that are interculturally appropriate (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002; Liddicoat, 2011). Not only does this approach call for more active student participation, but it also emphasizes the positioning of students as influential in shaping the classroom learning experience. Bernstein (2003) refers to this as the invisible pedagogy, where learners are treated as persons with valuable personal experiences that are worth sharing. Gholami and Husu (2010) echoed this sentiment through the proposition of a pedagogy based on 'moral ethos', where the teaching and learning processes are grounded in the view that students are intelligent beings who are capable of contributing to a lesson.

The expectation to integrate ICC is also highly relevant in Asian contexts. We can observe this expectation through various educational reforms, such as the introduction of regional policies seen through the ASEAN Economic Community roadmap (Kirkpatrick, 2012). In Thailand, there are also national policies which recognize the value of intercultural exploration in the English classroom, such as that seen in the Basic Education Curriculum (BEC) introduced in 2008 (Wongsothorn, Hiranburana, & Chinnawongs, 2002). The BEC states that English should be used as a platform to compare and contrast local Thai culture and that of the target language, as well as to use the English language about others. While various studies have sought to examine how these educational reforms were implemented at the classroom level, these studies have focused mainly on English teachers in public Thai schools (Hayes, 2009; 2010; de Segovia & Hardison, 2009). Though offering interesting insights, these studies on local English teachers and their classrooms have not directly addressed the position of students, especially those in an intercultural setting in private English international schools in Thailand, which is a fast-growing educational enterprise. This growth can be observed through the greater proportion of public spending and investment (Cuesta & Madrigal, 2014), as well as the mobility of non-local English teachers arriving in Thailand (Hickey, 2018).

To have a better understanding of students in an intercultural and an international classroom setting, this study offers a situated conceptualization of students through the analysis of how they are discursively positioned by 17 non-local English language teachers teaching in Bangkok. While this number of participants may not be representative of all non-local English teachers in Bangkok, it furnishes us with a glimpse into current educational discourses, especially those pertinent to international aspects of education and ICC. Furthermore, we believe that the findings from this study will be valuable to current discussions about students, especially those in collectivist societies. This is crucial because relying on hegemonic perceptions towards these students based on generalized assumptions will rob from them a justified representation (Duff & Uchida, 1997).

2. Students in the Intercultural Classroom

The intercultural approach in language pedagogy was proposed based on the view that English is no longer a fixed racial or cultural identifier (Hismanoglu, 2011; Kachru, 2011; Liddicoat, 2011; Morgan & Clarke, 2011); instead, it is a medium from which critical understandings of the world can be gained through global exchanges (Fettes, 2003; Pennycook, 2001). Proponents of ICC suggest that students be taught intercultural strategies and skills, and develop culturally appropriate attitudes about self and others to facilitate global communication (Byram, 1997; Liddicoat, 2011). This teaching approach presents a learning context that offers a dynamic site for identity development through positive opportunities for critical discussions about cultural differences (Zarate, 2003), and subsequently instill a sense of 'otherness, which is the acceptance of others' distinctive cultural framework (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002).

To achieve this in the English language classroom, culture is not delivered as a body of information, rather, it is treated as a catalyst for students' active engagement in making and negotiating meaning. Roles that students assume in an intercultural lesson would allow strategies that enable them to *notice* similarities and differences of cultural systems, *compare* these similarities and differences, *reflect* to gain meaningful interpretations of cultural systems, and *interact* to be engaged with others for the purpose of negotiating and exchanging meaning (Liddicoat, 2011). Through these processes, it is hoped students

would be able to achieve intercultural competencies. Byram (1997, p. 34) lists the following as integral intercultural competencies:

1. Knowledge of self and other; of how interaction occurs, of the relationship of the individual to society,

2. Knowing how to interpret and relate information,

3. Knowing how to engage with political consequences of education; being critically aware of cultural behaviors;

4. Knowing how to discover cultural information;

5. Knowing how to relativize oneself and value the attitudes and beliefs of others.

The learning strategies and aims mentioned above not only make up the crucial attributes of students in an intercultural setting, but they also reflect the current discourse about the position of English language students. Clarke (2008) describes this as perceiving students as 'heterogeneous geniuses', where they are recognized as having different lived experiences which are of value to their peers, and are expected to take an active part in the learning process as a means to make sense of their personal experiences of the world through interaction with their peers.

3. Asian Students: A Challenge for Intercultural Lessons?

Though approaches for the intercultural framework have been prescribed, such as those discussed above, the inclusion of intercultural lessons may be challenging, especially since it calls for more student involvement. Students from collectivist societies, such as those of Asia, have been viewed as traditional, when compared to the western counterparts. This may stem from many Asian countries whose educational philosophy is grounded in Confucian principles. These principles include respecting knowledge and authority, having an interest in both intellectual and moral development, and accumulating knowledge (Hu, 2002; Nguyen, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2006). When translating these principles into learning approaches, students have appeared as passive learners, resistant towards innovations in teaching and learning, reliant on memory-based learning strategies, possessing a positivistic view of knowledge, and being preoccupied in maintaining harmonious relationships. This, unfortunately, may not bode well with the

intercultural principles as mentioned previously, which emphasize critical thinking and active participation.

These challenges bring about two points worth considering, especially when considering the implementation of an intercultural approach. First, the circumstances of Asian students may not align with the intercultural framework. The circumstances which may cause hindrances for the integration of intercultural lessons may be cultural or language proficiency. For instance, Holmes (2006) reported that Chinese students studying in New Zealand found it difficult to be engaged in intercultural activities because they were restricted by their cultural values, such as the notion of 'face' and the collectivist value of maintaining group harmony. On the other hand, students, especially those from non-English speaking countries, may find it difficult to be openly engaged in intercultural communication. Hismanoglu (2011) reported that students with lower levels of English language proficiency struggled with intercultural communication. This poses a challenge for in-class activities, which, as reported by Kam (2002) and Kirkpatrick (2016), leads to non-communicative learning activities because of a mismatch between students' communicative ability and educational level. Second, students may not see the value of learning English communicatively, or even interculturally. For instance, studies by Foley (2005) and de Segovia and Hardison (2009) in local Thai English classrooms reported how students were more inclined to study for university entrance examinations, and not necessarily for social uses of the English. Teachers, then, were compelled to only employ a rote approach with very minimal communicative activities. There were also studies which have reported that students were found to be disinterested in English because they do not see the immediate relevance and instrumental value of learning this language (Hayes, 2010).

Students, of course, are not the only antagonists when it comes to the implementation of educational paradigms. Teachers have been found to play a crucial role as well. For instance, teachers may interpret educational paradigms differently, and subsequently employ a different teaching approach or learning content (de Segovia & Hardison, 2009; Hayes, 2010). In the case of teaching culture, teachers, as well as their schools, were also found to be hesitant. This is due to the view that introducing foreign cultural perspectives into the English language classroom could possibly tarnish

the local culture or the students' way of thinking. For instance, local practices may be disregarded and influenced by those from the west which are perceived as popular (Ding & Teo, 2014; Hayes, 2010). The introduction of foreign curriculum may also act as a stumbling block to the students, teachers, and the society at large, especially if a curriculum does not share cultural values. For instance, in a meta-analysis of the implementation of intercultural education in Cyprus, it was found that there were intercultural materials, reforms, and policies which did not coincide with the tenets of ICC, such as that seen in the promotion of the disadvantaged status of immigrant students (Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2017).

4. The Study

4.1 Positioning of Social Entities in Discourse

In studying social entities in English teachers' discourse, the socio-cultural approach has been found useful, especially for issues regarding identities, social relations and contexts. These studies have revealed how teachers identify themselves as English teachers and how students are identified (Luk, 2012), how teachers' management of pedagogy is shaped by their identity, local context, or administrator expectations (Tsui, 2007), as well as how other entities view them as English teachers (Trent, 2012). What these studies bring to us is an overview of complex relations formed as a result of their discursive interaction with other pertinent entities, as well as with their educational parameters.

Since a person's role becomes evident through social relations, a useful framework for the analysis is the positioning framework (Harré & van Lagenhove, 1999). This framework posits that selfhood is continuously, as well as overtly and tacitly, constructed and reconstructed in discourse. The construction process not only involves the description of self, but others as well. Other entities are important for the understanding of self, as they may reveal similarities or differences, or even act as agents for legitimating the position enacted for the self (Bucholtz & Hall, 2010; Harré & van Lagenhove, 1999). Other entities may be other people or objects. For example, in Trent's (2012) study, other entities come in the form of students, colleagues, administrators, and curriculum.

The positioning framework treats language as *la parole*, where positioning may be derived from elements such as speech acts (function), indexicality (discrete linguistic items), and context (meaning). These observable elements contribute to the formation of a positioning. Harré and van Lagenhove (1999) state that when analyzing positioning, the following elements may be helpful:

1. Images and metaphors represented through word choice;

2. Political and moral commitments, or attitudes towards other speakers or audience; and,

3. Roles or responsibilities of discourse participants

With these in mind, positioning of students may be analyzed through discourse. In our study, this is done through the examination of pronominal markers. Pronominal markers, or pronouns, which are discourse indices, are able to provide a discursive account of social entities and their relations with each other. Typically, other studies on classroom social entities and relations have examined actual teaching and learning practice. While these approaches may be useful, Goodson (1991, p. 39) warned that this may place too much focus on 'practice', that what needs to be 'listened to' is missed out, and instead 'only hears' what will "sound well when replayed to the research community." Hence, with the intention of sponsoring a 'voice' for English teachers, this study collected teachers' spoken discourse for analysis.

4.2 Context and Participants

In Thailand, the National Educational Act of 1999 saw the reform of school curriculum, which saw the introduction of 4Cs (culture, communication, connection, and communities) (Foley, 2005). Though intercultural communicative competence is considered an integral part of this educational reform, an emphasis was still placed on maintaining Thai identity, especially after the global economic crisis of 1997, which had thrown a blanket of caution over how Thailand viewed itself as a global player (Foley, 2005). This led to the reform seen in the 2002 National Education Curriculum, which places an importance on Thai wisdom, local wisdom, and community development (Baker, 2008).

Along with these educational reforms, Thailand has also seen an increase in the establishment of international educational institutions and public spending on private

education (Cuesta & Madrigal, 2014). These international private schools emphasize English language education, with the aim of producing learners who are proficient communicatively and interculturally. In Thailand, these schools may be categorized into two types. First, an international school may be one that is operating fully with an English curriculum from a western country such as the US or the UK. Nonetheless, there may be a course or two on Thai values or language. The second type is the Thai-bilingual school. In a Thai-bilingual school, there is the normal program, where the medium of instruction is Thai, and the English program (EP), where students learn mathematics, sciences, and English language in English. Other subjects, though, are taught in Thai. In both types of schools, non-local teachers are typically hired for their language skills, while local teachers, especially those with higher educational qualifications, may be considered (Punthumasen, 2007). These schools received accreditation either by the local government, or external bodies such as the Western Association of School and Colleges (WASC) or the Council of International Schools (Kaur, Young, & Kirkpatrick, 2016). In this study, the participants (n=17), who were non-local English teachers, worked in these two types of schools. These teachers were recruited through convenience sampling, wherein contacts of the primary researcher who agreed to participate in this study introduced their colleagues or other English teachers. Despite the difference in the participants' teaching context and teaching experiences, all of them reported that their schools acknowledged the importance of students developing intercultural competence, seen in the schools' ASEAN courses and intra- and inter-mural cultural activities. The participants' context of teaching, pseudonyms, and class type are given in Table 1.

Table 1

Context of teaching, participants' pseudonyms, English class type

Context: International Schools	
Pseudonym	*Type of English Language Class (or other languages)*
1. Tanya	English (integrated skills), English literature, Spanish
2. Helen	English (integrated skills), English literature
3. Melissa	English (integrated skills)
4. Julie	English (integrated skills), English literature
5. Lois	English (integrated skills), English literature
6. Thomas	English communications (speaking and listening)
7. Devin	English communications (speaking and listening)
8. Colin	English communications (speaking and listening)
9. Steven	English communications (speaking and listening)
10. Paula	English communications (speaking and listening)
11. Peter	English communications (speaking and listening)
Context: English Program in Thai Bilingual Schools	
12. Harry	English communications (speaking and listening)
13. Bob	English communications (speaking and listening)
14. Crystal	English communications (speaking and listening)
15. Tom	English communications (speaking and listening)
16. Daniel	English (integrated skills)
17. Darius	English (integrated skills)

4.3 Data Collection

Discourse data was collected from interviews conducted separately by the primary researcher. Each participant was interviewed once, with each interview session lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The length of the interviews was considered

ample as the positioning framework posited that discursive meaning-making is not a phenomenon bound to time (Harré & van Lagenhove, 1999). The data collection tool – a semi-structured interview, was designed based on Moskowitz's (2005) framework for the understanding of self and others through affiliation, self-esteem, and epistemic knowledge of self and others (see Appendix). Throughout the interview, the broad term 'culture' was used. This helped maintain the veracity of the participants' responses by not pre-empting them to a certain outcome, or to create a 'halo effect' where participants reconstructs their responses to fit the research aims of this study (Lee, 2013). The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The sequence of the semi-structured interview items also varied, as discussions between participants and the primary researcher took on different routes. As this was spoken discourse, there were numerous instances of repetition and use of linguistic markers. These were removed as they were not significant for data analysis. There were grammatical errors as well; nonetheless, they were minor and were retained in the transcriptions. Since the study is interested in a specific pedagogic context, that is, the inclusion of ICC in English lessons, utterances which reflected this were extracted for analysis.

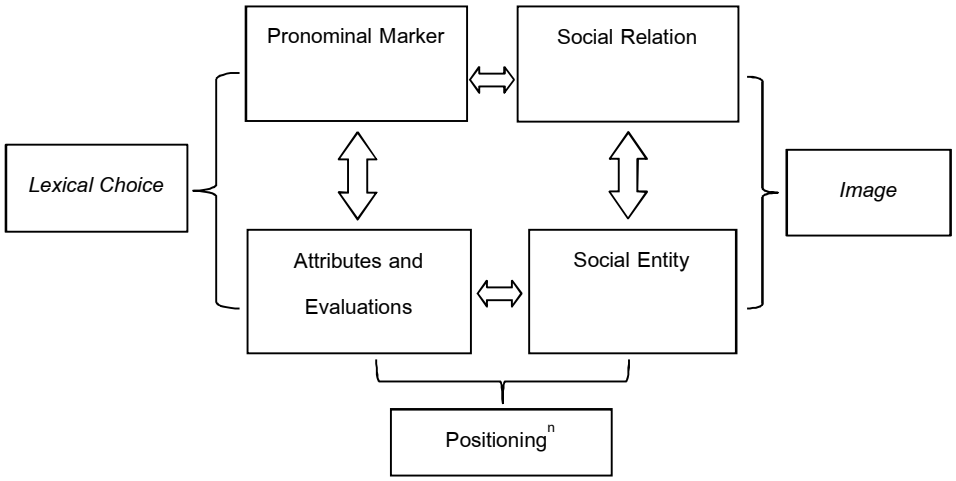
4.4 Data Analysis Procedure

The study employed positioning theory to analyze the discourse data. Specifically, we relied on indexicality, which, in this case, was pronominal markers, or pronouns, as well as the context in which these markers appeared. The analytical procedure began with the analysis of pronouns, which are considered images reflective of real world experiences that have the potential for revealing positionings. Pronouns, according to Pennycook (1994), have been underrepresented discourse objects. He argues that beyond its prescriptive meaning, "pronouns are deeply embedded in naming people and groups, and thus are always political in the sense that they always imply relations of power (p. 173). This view is reiterated by others, where pronominal references are recognized as socio-cultural features which divulge epistemologies about social relations and attribution of self and others in a natural unfolding discourse (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; 2010; Bull & Fetzer, 2006; Duff, 2002; Harré & van Lagenhove, 1999; Harré, Moghaddam, Cairnie, Rothbart, & Sabat, 2009). For example, the pronoun "I" could refer exclusively

to an interlocutor. It may function as self-attribution, or to distance self from other entities (e.g., Zareva, 2013). The pronoun “we”, on the other hand, may include both interlocutor with the hearer and addressee, or exclusive to a speaker with a particular group, without including the hearer or addressee. This pronominal marker is typically used to indicate solidarity or proximity in group membership (e.g., Fortanet, 2004). The pronoun “you” could be used to equivocate, thus functioning as a social tool to create distance or exclusivity (e.g., Bull & Fetzer, 2006). Other types of pronouns, such as third-person pronouns, are also used to indicate particular type of persons who may or may not be part of the discourse events (e.g., Pennebaker, Mehl, & Niederhoffer, 2003). The meanings of pronouns may only be fully understood in their contexts of occurrence. This constituted the second analytical step, which involved an in-vivo analysis, where meaning was derived directly from lexical choices and their contexts of occurrence (Saldaña, 2009). This was done through the examination of lexical choices signifying attributes and evaluations of social entities (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Attributes are explicit or implicit references made towards the roles and responsibilities of a social entity evaluation, which may be seen through the use of modality, indicating the attitude or commitment of the speaker towards a social entity. This analytical procedure is represented in Figure 1 (see also Pavlenko, 2003; Trent, 2012).

Figure 1

Analytical procedure of positioning



The final step was to consolidate positionings based on associated meaning. Overarching positionings were created for the purpose of an intertextual approach to understand how the participants' students were positioned. These positionings were the bases for discussion in the next section.

5. Findings

There were four main positionings that emerged from the discourse data (Table 2). These positionings were derived based on the pronominal markers within their context of occurrence. These positionings were deliberated iteratively between the three researchers through the theory of positioning as a means for consistent examination (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002).

Table 2

Positionings from participants' discourse data

Positioning of students	Remarks	Participants
English learners	Have deficient communicative skills; lack in confidence; models after teachers; learning is bound to curriculum; lack otherness or openness	Colin, Steven, Harry, Bob, Crystal, Tanya, Thomas, Devin, Daniel, Lois
English users	Think in English; able to communicate in English for various purposes	Tom, Peter, Paula, Melissa, Darius, Devin
Teaching counterpart	Contribute to lessons; shape lessons	Thomas, Helen, Julie, Tanya
World residents	English as a means to better understand others' experiences or way of life; perceptive towards their environment	Julie, Lois, Tanya, Helen, Melissa

As seen in Table 2, the positionings begin with students who lacked English language proficiency and progress to students who are able to talk about individual experiences. The order of these positionings reflect the degree of intercultural competence and communicative ability of the students (see Deardorff, 2006; Loo, Trakulkasemsuk, &

Jimarkon Zilli, 2017; Najar, 2014). In the following sections, the four positionings are discussed. Significant linguistic cues are marked (pronominal markers – bold; context: attributes and evaluations – underlined) in the extracts. The extracts are also identified by the name of the participant and the extract number (e.g., E1, E2, and so forth).

5.1 English Learners

Though the schools where the participants taught promoted the development of intercultural competence, most of the English teachers positioned their students only as English learners. When asked about their approach in teaching English, several participants were distanced using the exclusive third-person pronoun (e.g., their, they, them). These pronouns were also followed by negative attributions, such as students not caring, making mistakes, and being unresponsive.

> *[Colin, E1] If you're not going to try in class, because some students **they** don't care, almost about English. **They** think it's just a free class for **them** to play around, but you know, **I** tell **them**, "If you don't try hard, if you don't put effort into your work, in your future, might be some trouble for you."*
>
> *[Steven, E2] Fluency. I mean, of course, trying to make **them** use the language correctly. I mean, many students, even in Mathayom six (Grade 12) still make basic mistakes, and I'm just trying to make **them** understand that **they** can't make those mistakes anymore*
>
> *[Crystal, E3] Because when teaching English, you have to involve **them**, have to act out, **they** have to speak. My subject is listening and speaking, **they** can't just sit down and listen. **They** have to speak as well, so the interaction in the teaching is important...I come to them as a teacher. I'm an English listening and speaking teacher, and that's how I approach **them**.*

As seen in the excerpts above, students were positioned as English learners for different reasons. They were attributed as having a deficit in their English language proficiency

or a lack of interest in learning English. For example, Colin [E1] emphasized the cosmopolitan and economic benefits of English, in that the language may have a bearing on students' future success; Steven [E2] emphasized the correct use of English, possibly frustrated that his students, even at their last year of secondary school, were not able to communicate correctly in English; Crystal [E3], on the other hand, emphasized the need for the students to speak up, and not just sit and listen, so as to reflect the communicative and interactive nature of using a language. The sentiment present in Crystal's discourse inadvertently positioned her as being solely an English language teacher, who is interested in improving students' language proficiency. This may be said of Colin and Steven as well. A potential reason for the positioning of students seen in these three teachers' accounts could be their school context. Crystal, Colin, and Steven are all working for the EPs of Thai-bilingual school, where students consist of local Thais, and most school subjects are taught in Thai.

Despite the emphasis placed on the development of English language proficiency, it would be naive to say that the English teachers discounted the role of culture entirely. Most of the participants were aware of the cultural component present in their syllabi. Nonetheless, their commitment to the teaching of culture varied, and appeared to be determined by the level of English proficiency of their students. Even when discussing their students' cultural knowledge and skills, teachers attributed an exclusive and distanced position for their students, this may be seen in an excerpt from Harry's [E4] interview.

> *[Harry, E4] You know for students at this stage just give **them** some sort of an awareness, there is something that people there behave different from you, and different doesn't necessarily mean strange or unwanted, or something like that. Respect the unknown like respect the way you want people to respect your culture.*

While Harry may be working for an EP where most of his students are local Thais, he still holds the view that a communications class could serve as a space where cultural awareness can be developed. It must be said that while EPs are built around the Thai curriculum, there is also the effort of introducing facets of culture through activities and classes on ASEAN. Nonetheless, an awareness may be sufficient as greater priority is

given to students' English language development (Deerajviset, 2014). Similar to Harry, Tanya [E5] was committed to conveying cultural lessons in her English classroom, despite the frustration due to her students' lack of English proficiency. Tanya's commitment indicated that she had positioned her students positively as well, through the realization that her students may revisit cultural elements in classroom interaction. Tanya was also teaching at an international school, where most students can communicate in English and all subjects are taught in English. This, perhaps, could be a reason why contexts, such as Tanya's, are more open to the integration of culture, and subsequently the development of students' intercultural competencies, because of the presence of students from various cultural backgrounds working together in the same medium for communication. Tanya, on a personal level, has also traveled extensively, having taught in North and South America prior to Bangkok.

> *[Tanya, E5] Despite the low proficiency and in that way, in those senses I have to really perfect my lecture because I know that I have to use really simple words, and be very straightforward, I can't hint towards things often times if you allude some things students will pick up on it and* ***they*** *will bring it back in the conversation, with these kids I really tell them in bullet form...It gets to be a little bit frustrating teaching grammar just because I feel very bored with it.*

Aside from helping students gain an awareness, culture may also be used to draw the interest of the students to learn English, as seen in an excerpt from Thomas's [E6] interview below.

> *[Thomas, E6] Teaching English requires a kind of educational approach, as in* ***they*** *like to know stuff here, so I have to teach* ***them*** *verbs and forms...If I'm teaching them and there's something that's going to inspire* ***them****, that's going in the lesson, as part of the English lesson, so it might be culture, but it might be if there is a piece of science lesson that suits the language, that would go in as well.*

Perhaps a general commitment shared by most of the participants can be summed up in Lois's [E7a] comment, "*maybe not further down the schools, cause **their** language needs to be better*". Once students have an acceptable level of English language proficiency, teachers may be more willing to integrate cultural elements for the development of intercultural skills because the students would have the vocabulary to express themselves. Furthermore, this "*makes them more open minded,* and it *helps them accept people*" (Lois, E7b).

Nonetheless, despite the use of curricula that integrates culture, and the presence of international teaching staff and student body, many of the participants still attribute themselves as English language teachers, as seen in some of the responses given by teachers for the question on how they viewed themselves This indirectly positioned students as being English language learners. We can see these attributions in the following excerpts:

> *[Bob, E8] I only teach English here*
> *[Harry, E9] It's not really our job to teach. In our job description we have a syllabus and I would do every now and then, I would touch culture, but normally then we would just focus on English*
> *[Daniel, E10] It's more about the language, there's no real, there's no big exposure to culture*
> *[Devin, E11] It's definitely different because when you're teaching a subject you're focused on the mechanics or whatever it is. You as a teacher of English, you're definitely a model of the sounds of English.*

For some of these students, ICC may not be a priority because of the developing status of their English language. Furthermore, teachers who view themselves as only English teachers also inadvertently position their students as having to learn the English language, and not necessarily use them in intercultural or international communication.

5.2 English Users

The positioning of English users is a step up from that of an English learner. Some of the participants positioned their students as English users. This subject positioning was evident among participants who attributed their students as having the ability and responsibility to use the English language for communication or task completion, even if at times the task may not be of immediate relevance to building knowledge about the English language. While there is some level of inclusivity, the emphasis is still on the exclusive student, especially if students are positioned negatively. A reason for the apparent distance may be because students were still positioned as the primary learning entity, with the aim of getting the students to develop fluency. Some of the negative attributions assigned to the students include students' unwillingness to communicate because of the inability of voicing opinions (Tom, E12), or the fear of making mistakes (Peter, E13), or the apprehensiveness to use English to communicate (Paula, E14).

> *[Tom, E12] But **they** don't answer even when I call them on a subject you know. It's like just getting **them** to give an opinion is really difficult. So **we** talked about democracy and **we** talked about the strength of an army in a country, and what is a balance, what's a good balance, where do politics come into*
>
> *[Peter, E13] I try to say to **them**, "Even if you're not sure of the word you're going to use, or if the sentence is in the wrong way around, the structure's wrong, an English speaking person will still understand what you're trying to get across, so don't be afraid to say what you think might be right because they'll still understand you"*
>
> *[Paula, E14] My job here is to encourage **them** to speak English, to feel good about speaking English, that's my first step.*

Aside from the use of an exclusive third-person pronoun, there were also participants who positioned their students with the use of the second-person pronoun, "you". While "you" may be a strategy to equivocate, we could also see how it is used to draw in the listener, who, in this case, is the primary researcher. The purpose of this strategy is to

create a sense of solidarity between interlocutors by enacting inclusivity. Hence, in the case of Melissa (E15), as seen below, the use of the second-person pronoun is not ambiguous, given that the context helped identify who the referent was.

> *[Melissa, E15] I think with communication I think the key is being confident. If* ***you're*** *confident enough* ***you*** *are able to communicate whatever is on* ***your*** *mind, …and even if that's in broken English, if* ***you're*** *confident enough people will understand* ***you***

While some of the students' positioning may be derived overtly, there were also those that were implied. For example, students may use English communicatively if their teachers gained rapport with them, as mentioned by Devin (E16). Or, in Darius' case (E17), getting students to contribute based on a common interest. While Darius showed how culture may be used as a platform for language teaching – a sentiment shared by Thomas – Darius' primary focus was not on the structure and form of the English language. Instead, he was interested in getting students to be a part of the classroom interaction. This resonates with Luk's (2012) study, wherein teachers reported the cultural elements in their English lessons as serving the purpose of whetting the appetite of their students.

> *[Devin, E16] People like people when they are like people, and part of being a teacher is gaining rapport with people and the more rapport that teacher has with the student, the more there is an exchange of communication and information*

> *[Darius, E17] That will be a great starting point for discussion for the students to improve how they talk about certain events or festivals. That's exactly what we did the last fifteen minutes in class where I just asked individual students, have you ever been to any festivals, have you been to concerts, what can you tell me about those concerts*

As observed in the excerpts, participants who position students as English user focus on communicating in the target language but not necessarily to achieve ICC goals. In this positioning, information is also very transactional; thus, limiting the construction of

knowledge to surface or descriptive exploration of topics presented by a teacher or a syllabus.

5.3 Teaching Counterpart

Some of the participants had indicated that their students have meaningful insights to contribute to the classroom learning experience. In such classroom situations, teachers positioned themselves with their students as an inclusive entity through the use of "we" or "us", or through the use of the exclusive third-person pronominal marker "they", which indicates a specific attribute that the students have. This may be seen in the excerpts from Helen (E18) and Tanya (E19). While Helen positioned her students as having knowledge that others may not have, and that the imbalance of knowledge was useful as it gave students the opportunity to share with the rest of the class, Tanya positioned her students as having the responsibility to teach others about different cultures.

> *[Helen, E18] When you're teaching in an international school, at an international environment, and the kids come from so many different backgrounds, uhm, it would be pointless for me to try and find a specific uhm cultural reference point that everybody can relate to because there is such a diverse range of kids in the school … usually* ***we*** *end up in a situation where half the class knows something about what* ***we're*** *talking about, and the other half don't, and it sort of gets shared around like that, and that can be nice because students who do not have experience of that kind of cultural background are able to bring something to the room that* ***they*** *wouldn't necessarily otherwise have been able to contribute*
>
> *[Tanya, E19] About twice a year I'll have students present folklores, two different countries,* ***they*** *have to choose a country,* ***they*** *have to either present a folklore or* ***they*** *have to present a custom, and when students present …* ***they*** *have to teach* ***us*** *something*

Aside from the use of inclusive pronominal markers, exclusive pronominal markers also implied inclusive responsibilities that students played in some of the participants' classroom. For instance, in describing how some of their lessons are conducted, Thomas (E20) and Julie (E21) positioned their students as having to offer their 'opinions'.

> *[Thomas, E20] I had students last year critiquing art, and in the Asian culture, from my limited experience, that's not normal at all, to offer that type of opinion … **they** choose **their** way of doing it, so any cultural, and also reference stuff*
>
> *[Julie, E21] No, it's more of a discussion, wherever possible, I'm interested in **their** view, and also I'm interested in **their** comments on it, if I say these are sorts of things that happen in England, I want **their** opinions on it*

Having students contribute is an integral facet of the development of ICC. It not only gives students the opportunity to practice their communications skill, but it also gives them grounds to evaluate their ideas and perceptions towards their own or others' culture. Moreover, having the space for students to contribute creates an egalitarian classroom situation, in that students are given the power to shape the learning direction.

5.4 World Residents

Along with the positioning of students as teaching counterparts, the positioning of students as world residents was also evident in some of the participants' discourse. The positioning of students as world residents signified a broader view that some teachers had for their students. This entails the willingness of the class to delve into topics which the local community may perceive as taboo, or to critically consider issues pertinent to a society. This echoes the discussion of teaching with moral ethos by Gholami and Husu (2010), wherein teachers have in mind students' and their community's welfare within and beyond the classroom. In terms of the positioning of students through pronominal markers, there is a distancing created through the exclusive first-person pronoun "I" to signify the teacher and the third-person pronoun "they", "them", or "their".

In most instances, the positioning of the students is derived from the overt mention of the students, or from discourse meaning.

> *[Lois, E22] The parents, because they are from a different culture, sometimes they don't want to confront those things, and they don't want their **kids** to know about those things. You know I was in a school, where the library they ordered a pack of books, all about different social issues, but the principal of the school didn't allow them to put the one on drugs into the library*

What we can see through Lois' (E22) response is how the class still pulls through even though there may be sanctions stipulated by the school. Lois' actions may be lauded as taking on a stance in critical pedagogy for social justice, or it could also be considered as a brash disregard for authority. Her decision to speak about 'drugs' in spite of the school's decision to remove the books reflect the significance of the topic for her students, and that they were capable of handling it. Though Lois's efforts may be hindered by her social parameter, Helen (E23) and Julie (E24) seemed to be able to include what they believed to be essential when preparing their students for the world beyond the classroom. This supports the principle of intercultural education, where students may be acclimatized with the political consequences of their education, as well as their ideologies (Byram, 1997).

> *[Helen, E23] As a teacher I feel very aware that **children** and **teenagers** especially are able to be persuaded by what their teachers tell **them**. So I don't ever want to force **them** to believe something. But if I have the power to prevent racists and homophobes and bigots and sexists from entering this world then I do that probably quite heavy handedly, but my **students** are quite happy to argue back with me. So I don't feel too bad about that.*
>
> *[Julie, E24] Education is preparing **them** for life outside, and because I feel quite strongly about how the world is going at the moment with different wars, you know lack of understanding, anything I can do to help **kids** have a broader understanding of other countries and what is important for the country, I think that's almost my duty to do that*

Because of the role that students may play in the world, the positioning of the students is not constrained to just being an English learner. Instead, a dynamic position is attributed to them, which ranges from being an English student to an active social entity whose actions and thoughts may have a bearing on their community and the world. This allows for the critical examination of self and others (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002; Zarate, 2003).

> *[Tanya, E25] I think it will give the* ***students*** *a bigger vision of maybe who they want to be. Maybe it'll help* ***them*** *see themselves more clearly and know that, you know, I don't think that people should be put in a box*

> *[Melissa, E26] It's very enriching, you learn a lot about it and I think that's why I try and give* ***them*** *that much, I think the more you know about how the world handles things, the more you feel ready to live in the world*

6. Discussion

This study showed what McKay (2012, p. 29) calls a "picture of how (language learners) in various communities around the world use English for specific communicative purposes." It needs to be pointed out, though, that this study does not aim for generalizable implications. What we did was draw attention to crucial issues pertinent to English language classrooms in a particular context. Aside from insights into social entities pertinent to the English language classroom, the four types of subject positioning gleaned from the discourse of the participants indicate the different perspectives held towards the role of culture, and subsequently the value of intercultural competence. While the first two positionings may be indicative of the peripheral position that culture may have in the English language classroom, in that a committed participation was hindered by the limitation in English language proficiency, the other two positionings pertain to the significant value of intercultural competence for global communication in English. While this study adds to the literature on the role of culture to local educational aspirations (cf. Ding & Teo, 2014), and its relevance in the English classroom context

(cf. Baker, 2008), it may also pave the way for a growing understanding of the status of ICC in the ASEAN context. In other ASEAN contexts, it has been found that English language classrooms have provided a site for students to examine cultural systems of self and others. For example, in a study conducted by Lee, Lee, Wong, and Ya'acob (2010), English language learners in Malaysia were able to express themselves to a larger variety of audience, as well as to gain access to different cultural perspectives. It is through the English language that the integration of ICC could also address controversial issues which ASEAN may not account for (see Quayle, 2013). Since ASEAN is thought of more of a diplomatic network, the integration of cultural aspects in a language classroom may push for a more cosmopolitan approach for the understanding of the region, which includes addressing social issues which may be up for contention. Nonetheless, because of cultural norms (see for example the case of Thailand in Baker [2008]), school contexts that use international curricula may need to carefully evaluate the value and mode in which non-local cultures are brought into the language classroom.

7. Implications

Some pedagogical implications which may be drawn include those that concern the presentation of culture in an English language classroom and the role of non-local English teachers. In terms of the presentation of culture, there needs to be careful planning in the selection of materials, the delivery of these materials, the manipulation of these materials by students, and the assessment of the learning of these materials. The selection and delivery of materials need to be carefully done so as to not convey misguided notions, such as the superiority of English-speaking cultures in the process of learning English. Instead, it should be made known to students that English can be a bridge for different cultures to come together. Cultural materials also need to be relevant to the students. This can be decided based on a particular analytical or communicative skill that a teacher intends to develop, but perhaps most importantly, it needs to be sourced from what students (partially) know. As seen in some of the discourse accounts of the participants, instances where students participated were those which students themselves had cultural capital. As such, not only did students

have the opportunity to be involved in a cultural dialogue, but they were also actively using English as a means for communication. The responsibilities of non-local English teachers should also move beyond the teaching of the English language. With English as a global language, it must not be assumed that the primary function of an English teacher is to impart a form of standard English; instead, realistic uses of English should also be imbued. This would include opening up the English language classroom for cultural aspects that are relevant to students. Not only will this encourage more student-centered approach in language teaching and learning, it will also help students realize the importance of English, even in communicating ideas which are not necessarily grounded in English-speaking cultural norms. Furthermore, from an intercultural perspective, this may support students' development of intercultural analytical skills. When students are able to conceive how language may be fitting to understand the world around them, they are inadvertently given opportunities to notice and question, and perhaps begin the process of instilling critical perspectives regarding different cultural systems.

From the perspective of assessment, the notion of multiple possibilities is considered valuable. This is due to the acknowledgement that there are multiple possibilities in the way one thinks, and ultimately, in the way one uses a language for communication. This is even more relevant in contexts where English is used as a foreign language. As argued by Baker (2011), "in ELF the connections between language and culture should be viewed primarily as fluid, emergent and liminal with no a priori specified target community" (p. 212). Hence, when assessing students' intercultural competence, their awareness of the complexity posed by cultural systems should be the priori, instead of the truthfulness of cultural knowledge (Deardorff, 2006). When contributions are evaluated based on correctness, this leads to a simplification of the intercultural paradigm, but also limits the participation opportunities of students. A potential reason for the presentation of culture as right or wrong is perhaps due to the students' access to capital to aid in their learning. Students' lack of language proficiency and interest may render discussion activities too simplistic or pointless as they may not have enough tools to explicate on topics in the target language. Hence, careful consideration needs to be made, especially with the negative positionings of students. Duff (2010)

warns, with particular interest to second language learners of English, that systems of power may easily hamper their motivation and drive to learn the target language. She further cautions that students' discomfort, or lack of interest may be "an internally generated form of anxiety or a lack of immediate identification or familiarity with the new target discourses and community practices" (p. 176).

From a research point of view, this study provided us with insights into social entities or social settings which have a significant bearing on teachers' professional lives through the examination of pronominal markers and their attributes. As argued, pronominal markers have a deeper socio-political meaning that have the potential of revealing epistemologies or discourses pertinent to a social entity, object, or context. The analysis of pronominal markers also provides an alternate route for the understanding of teachers' lives and professionalism, which according to Goodson (1991), is crucial as it reveals the subjectivities of the teachers. Another research implication is the understanding of the co-occurrence of seemingly disparate social entities. As seen in the discourse excerpts, a social distancing through shifts in pronominal markers, or pronouns, may be seen as a strategy to distinguish social entities. Nonetheless, this may not be an exclusive demarcation of positioning; instead, it could be a marker for roles that need to coexist and are complementary to different subject positions working in tandem. For a more encompassing view of subject positioning in the classroom, future research could perhaps consider taking into account self-positionings by social entities that emerge from the discourse of an interlocutor.

8. Conclusion

The four positionings that emerged from the discourse of the participants signify different levels of ICC implementation. From these positionings, we could also tell the level of English proficiency. More than this, we were also allowed insights into different educational contexts and the beliefs of non-local English teachers. Hence, in the contexts of these participants, intercultural education may be far from its fullest potential. To support the appropriate integration of ICC in the English language classroom, a normalization of important teaching and learning content through modification of materials or socialization into a different academic realm is perhaps warranted (see Hayes, 2009; Duff, 2010).

This is because teaching approaches and the curricula from foreign contexts that are readily adapted may be systems of power which may not be sensitive to the local conventions. If teachers do not to address this mismatch, students may realize that the system they are in restricts their investment on the grounds of their personalities or circumstances. This may inevitably lead to a dissipating interest in learning the target language. A plausible reason why the participants retained the positioning of students as only English learners could be due to them being uninformed regarding the teaching of the English language. While some of the participants do realize that English as an intercultural tool has social bearings important for the development of intercultural skills, many others still look at the language as only a system for conveying meaning, devoid of cultural systems or perspectives. Another reason could be that the parameters in which some these participants work do not recognize the value of teacher agency. Or perhaps, the participants themselves do not realize the benefits of having agency. As such, pedagogical approach and content become strictly confined to a syllabus, which may not even be suitable for the context of the students.

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Appendix Semi-structured interview questions

Do you teach culture in your classroom?	
Yes	**No**
What is culture?	What is culture?
What is your definition of culture?	What is your definition of culture?
What is in a 'culture'?	What is in a 'culture'?
How do you teach culture (in response to the previous questions)?	Why **don't** you teach culture?
	If you were to teach culture, how would you teach it?
How do you see yourself when you teach culture? Do you see yourself as having the same role when teaching English? Explain.	What kind of role would you take if you were to teach culture? Would it be the same as teaching English?
Who or what influences you to teach culture?	Who or what would influence your teaching of culture? Would it be from people (students/colleagues/administrators) or materials/environments, etc.
**Elaborate every influence that the interviewee mentions*	
When teaching culture, whose culture would you teach?	Do you think there is a particular culture which should be emphasized?
Would you teach your own culture? Why?	Would you consider teaching your own culture?
Do you personalize the cultures that you teach? Why?	Would you consider teaching non-native English speaking countries' culture?
Do you include cultures of other native/non-native speaking countries? Why?	Would you teach all cultures, disregarding the fact that some of these cultures are not associated with the English language?
Do you think it's necessary to be inclusive of a variety of culture, or do you think otherwise? Why?	
Do you see yourself as being a part of cultures you know of, even though you may not belong to them? Why?	

Do you teach culture in your classroom?	
Yes	**No**
Do you value the local culture in your teaching? Why?	Why don't you value the local culture in your teaching? Don't you think culture has an influence in the learning process?
Do you teach your students how to communicate between cultures? Why and how?	Do you think understanding culture is important to communicate? Why?
What role do you see yourself having in this teaching process? Why?	What role do you see yourself having in this process? Why?
Do you ever discuss teaching approaches for culture with your colleagues? Why?	Do you ever discuss whether culture should be taught with your colleagues, or other people? Why?
Do you share concerns or tips about your teaching of culture? Why?	Do you share the same view? Why?