

Thesis Abstract

Within multilingual ecologies, English language teaching is shaped by the sociocultural structures that govern the use of English inside and outside the classroom. This thesis is founded on an attempt to map the social life of English in the southern Indian state of Kerala from the perspective of teachers, whose roles were destabilised as the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the field of English teaching and teacher agency while prompting a reconsideration of its long-standing conventions. It interrogates the practices through which the English language influences the agency of teachers in Kerala. It aims to find how the voices of English school teachers, at the middle school levels, who shape the learning attitudes towards English are in turn shaped by their positionings in the two districts of Kerala- Thiruvananthapuram and Kozhikode- which are representative of the southern and northern regions of Kerala. For this, it employs qualitative methods, including in-person observations of English classrooms and semistructured interviews with English school teachers from Classes VI and VIII in select government schools, as well as critical discourse analysis of media representations, policy documents, and post-pandemic initiatives. Guided by theories of agency (Duranti, 2004; Ferrero, 2022) and performativity (Schechner, 2015), the study develops a framework of situated performance to understand how English school teachers in Kerala negotiate their subject positions through language. The thesis argues that English teachers in Kerala, through their multiple self-positioning, cultural schemas of English, performances of authority and empathy, collective resistance, and reimaginations of connection, exercise agency through the English language in fractured yet meaningful ways. The study contributes to ongoing debates about voice, power, and legitimacy in language teaching as it underscores the importance of attending to teacher subjectivities as emergent sites of ideological struggle and epistemic creativity.

Keywords: English school teachers, Kerala, agency, performativity, voice, positionings, practices