On Communicative Competence and Intercultural Understanding through the Lens of the Japanese Government-Approved English Language Textbook

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ABSTRACT

It has been more than decades since English education in Japan started focusing on communicative competence. Textbooks and lessons in public schools are chosen based on a government-made Course of Study (Guideline). The Guideline puts emphasis on communicative competence and intercultural understanding in terms of English language education. The Government's efforts to enact reform measures have failed, and the outcomes of various international assessments of Japanese English proficiencies are unsatisfactory. It implies that despite great effort the goal set by the Guideline has not been achieved yet. Students are motivated to learn English not for communication purposes but for test taking. This study examines a government-approved textbook for high school students' required course from Sanseido Press to see how the Guideline's objective is reflected in it. Since it is important to raise cultural awareness, this study tries to figure out how this textbook helps students understand other cultures. This study uses Alptekin's model of intercultural communicative competence and analyses the content of this textbook. This model is best for figuring out what makes effective intercultural understanding for nonnative English learners, which requires knowing about different cultures and being able to use that knowledge appropriately in any situation. The findings revealed a clear bias towards Japanese cultures and US citizens. It is assumed that American English is considered an ideal model for English education in Japan. It is recommended that textbooks accept the concept of World Englishes, include a more diverse culture, and get nonnative speakers involved.

Keywords: English education in Japan; intercultural understanding; cultural awareness; World Englishes; intercultural communicative competence

INTRODUCTION

Communicative competence has been a central focus of language learning from the beginning of the 21st century. This concept was introduced by Hymes (1972) and developed by several scholars such as Canale & Swain (1980) and Celce-Murcia (2008). In English language education in Japan, it is emphasized in the *Course of Study* (hereinafter the Guideline) which is issued by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). This Guideline is influential in terms of school curricula and textbooks. All textbooks for public education are based on the Guideline and authorized by MEXT. These textbooks are then called government-approved textbooks. Although the term 'communicative competence' is reiterated in the English language section, there is no clear definition or explicit goals of communicative competence in the Guideline. Therefore, not only the focus but also the strategy of learning the English language is ambiguous. In the midst of the transition period of the revision of the Guideline, it is worth exploring what has been brought to students through

their textbooks. This study aims to reveal the differences between the Guideline's goals and the textbook's content. The result of this study could give some insights for future reform plans of English language education.

This study examines the course '*English communication I*' which is compulsory for all high school students. This course aims to develop students' basic comprehension and representation skills, as well as their proactive attitudes towards English communication. In spite of the Guideline's great emphasis on communicative competence, in reality, Japanese students are motivated to learn English merely for test taking or admission for universities rather than communication per se (Butler & Iino, 2005). According to the survey conducted by Benesse Educational Research and Development Institute (2020), approximately 80% to 90% of freshmen high school students regard the English subject as valuable when it comes to examinations, job hunting, attractiveness, and admission to privileged high schools and universities.

Japan is almost a 'monolingual' society (Kato & Kumagai, 2020; Turnbull, 2020) and English is neither a language for communication nor a medium of instruction. Japanese students learn English as a foreign language (EFL), and the usage of English in Japan is very limited compared to English as a second language (ESL) countries. In other words, for many Japanese citizens, English is not necessary for their daily life. As a result of these circumstances, despite extensive compulsory English language education, Japanese English proficiency is still inadequate. According to the Educational Testing Service (2021), the Japanese' speaking score in TOEFL is marked as the lowest in Asia. This result indicates that communicative competence has not been established well and only a few Japanese think of themselves as bilingual (Turnbull, 2020). It implies the idea that multilingualism or plurilingualism has not been rooted in Japan yet. Taking these aspects into account, textbooks are the primary source of the English language, and it is influential in both students' perspectives and attitudes towards the English language.

Cultural understanding is essential for communicative competence so that cultural differences should be learned in English language classes aside from linguistic knowledge (Banjongjit & Boonmoh, 2018; Centinavci, 2012; Samimy & Kobayashi, 2004). This will provide grounds for evaluating the difference in student goal setting and the effectiveness of the cultural awareness technique outlined in the textbook. Since language is closely related to culture, students will be involved in communicating with people from different backgrounds in English through the lens of textbooks. The importance of learning about diverse cultures stems from the fact that the number of people communicating in languages other than English significantly exceeds the number of native English speakers (Graddol, 2006). Moreover, Graddol (2006) stated that multilingualism is becoming the norm and English in the United States or the United Kingdom is no longer the goal of learners. While Trudgill (2000) found that standard English is taught in schools to nonnative speakers.

Although there is no statement related to the model of Japanese English education in the Guideline, the so-called standard English seems to be the ideal English for educational purposes. Being the language of international communication, the so-called standard English does not have a clear definition and, due to this nature, it would be more productive to recommend that the policy of teaching English in Japan be considered as one of the options for World Englishes (Yuzar et al., 2022). It might be able to help the Japanese to have a wider view of multilingualism through English education. This study investigates the types of lesson topics chosen to foster students' communication abilities concerning cultural awareness.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

Communicative competence has been stipulated as an important goal in the Guideline for decades. Nevertheless, the Guideline must set the same goal as the main goal of English language education. Amid the transition period of the *Course of Study*, it is an urgent need to review the content of the textbook in order to understand how the goals of the *Course of Study* are reflected. By analysing the content of one of the currently used textbooks, this study hope to provide recommendations for future enhancements.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Structural approaches to achieving the goals in the textbook have different tactical approaches, which ideally should develop communicative competence and intercultural understanding of students. It is to clarify approaches in the development of intercultural understanding of students that this study poses the following questions as an object of study:

1. What kinds of approaches can be found in the government-approved textbook?
2. How does the textbook cultivate students' intercultural understanding with which topics?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The *Course of Study* or the Guideline is issued by MEXT in relation to School Education Law roughly once every ten years (MEXT, 2011). The Guideline is extremely influential in Japan since it specifies each subject's objectives and contents to ensure the quality of public education throughout the country. Respective schools design their school curricula based on the Guideline. All textbooks for public education are produced based on the Guideline and then required to be authorized by MEXT. Therefore, textbooks used in public education are called government-approved textbooks. For public schools, textbooks must be chosen from government-approved textbooks and respective boards of education have the right to choose the textbooks. The Guideline plays a central role as a basis for the Japanese education system.

MEXT has been emphasizing communicative competence in a foreign language since 1980 (Okuno, 2007). In Japan, the grammar-translation method has long been the favored approach to teaching English. In the latest version of the Guideline, communicative competence is a major goal in the subject area of Foreign Languages (MEXT, 2018). The term 'communicative competence' was introduced by Dell Hymes (1972). Hymes (1972) differentiated communicative competence from linguistic competence which was defined by Chomsky (1965). Both of the competencies benefit speech communication (Krish & May, 2020) however, the Guideline puts more emphasis on communicative competence. The concept of communicative competence was developed by several scholars such as Canale & Swain (1980) and Celce-Murcia (2008). The objective of English language courses is not only for students to acquire grammatical competence, but also to develop sociolinguistic competence by gaining exposure to diverse perspectives (Alptekin, 2002). Although the Guideline recognizes the importance of learning different cultures in English language classes by stating cultural awareness as one of the goals of foreign language teaching (MEXT, 2018), it seems there is a discrepancy between the Guideline and classroom realities (Nishino & Watanabe, 2008). The Guideline explains neither the definition of communicative competence nor the explicit level of skill that students should master. In addition, the Guideline does not refer to the ideal model of English.

Butler (2015) criticized that despite the Guideline's initiatives, the contents of the textbooks

still focus on the grammar-translation method, which has already been removed from the Guideline. The persistent emphasis on grammar is due to the existence of a stringent testing system that compels teachers to select more conventional teaching strategies (Mitchell, 2017). In a similar vein, this is supported by Samimy & Kobayashi (2004) and Jones (2019), who found that English education in Japan continues to focus on grammatical accuracy, which is strongly associated with university entrance exams. In an attempt to include speaking assessments, MEXT once tried to implement various non-governmental English examinations and international English examinations such as IELTS, TOEFL, and EIKEN (Practical English proficiency test prevalent in Japan) into the Common Test for University Admissions. However, due to several unresolved issues including adequate evaluation and examinee fairness, it was postponed and required further debate (MEXT, 2019). Jones (2019) explained the failure of this reform plan was caused by the educational climate that English is a key test subject in Japan. Consistent with this, Japanese students are motivated to learn English only for test taking or admission to universities rather than communication (Butler & Iino, 2005).

The viewpoints of 'World Englishes' (Kachru, 1986), English as an international language (Smith, 1976), or English as a lingua franca (Jenkins, 2006) seem to be missing in the Guideline. These notions are now widely accepted and should be incorporated into English language education. It is suggested that students should familiarize themselves with varieties of English used around the world because the ownership of English is not limited to the inner circle countries (Matsuda, 2002; Morrow, 2004; Yuzar et al., 2022). Through their textbooks, students should be exposed to a variety of themes from diverse cultures or points of view to appreciate the plurality of civilizations (Putra & Musigrungsi, 2022). Furthermore, Japanese students are more inclined to communicate with nonnative English speakers than with native English speakers. In Japan, so-called "American English" is preferred however, Kamiya (2008) discussed that accepting American norms without critical thinking would impede Japanese people from accepting the concept of World Englishes.

METHODOLOGY

CULTURAL REPRESENTATION IN THE TEXTBOOK

This study analysed and classified textbook topics to explore the issue of how a textbook develops students' communicative competence. In previous studies, researchers have pointed out some weaknesses of Japanese textbooks. On one hand, Yamanaka (2006) found that there was a bias towards the United States in terms of topics related to cultures. On the other hand, Ookawa (2015) discussed that there were no topics about countries such as Singapore or India where English is spoken as their official language. He also noted that in the culturological aspect, topics related to Japan dominated, and the Japanese were in many ways as the main characters. Yet local topics are inevitable for some reasons, for example, having knowledge and awareness of local culture can be a basis for cultural awareness (Nambiar et al., 2018). With regard to the style of the texts, according to Sakurai (2007), English language textbooks started to include various styles other than the narrative style which was dominant in 80' textbooks. According to Okuno (2007), the grammar-translation method is still used in the classroom due to its relative ease for teachers. He also pointed out that communicative competence could not be developed in this way of learning (Okuno, 2007). In addition, there are no stipulations in the Guideline regarding the style of texts or formats, which by definition means that students must be exposed to various types of texts in order to achieve communicative competence.

In this study, Alptekin's (2002) intercultural communicative competence model will be applied to examine textbook content, in which this researcher insisted that the model of communicative competence of native English speakers is utopian or unrealistic and it burdens both teachers and students, especially in the context of EFL. Centinavci (2012) and Samimy & Kobayashi (2004) support Alptekin's new model as an appropriate model for EFL learners. This model proposes teaching materials should contain both local and international contexts that are relevant and familiar to learners' lives and the discourse of both native-nonnative speakers' interactions and nonnative-nonnative speakers' interactions (Alptekin, 2002). This model, consisting of five criteria (1. English as an International Language, 2. Intercultural communicative competence, 3. Local and Global appropriacy, 4. Relevance/ Familiarity, 5. Native-Nonnative and Nonnative-Nonnative interactions) suggests that learning materials should contain both local and international contexts that are relevant and familiar to students' lives and the discourse of both native-nonnative speakers' interactions and nonnative-nonnative speakers' interactions. In this study, the analysis of textbooks will be based on Alptekin's (2002) model of intercultural communicative competence. Accordingly, lesson topics that have local or international context (1. Context), text type (2. Style of the text), elements to enhance students' cultural awareness (3. Cultural Awareness), relevance and familiarity to Japanese high school students (4. Relevance/ Familiarity), and people involved in the interaction (5. Discourse) will be considered. As for the codification, the authors made decisions individually and reached a consensus.

CULTURES, PEOPLE, AND THE VARIETIES OF ENGLISH

Fostering students' cultural awareness is important for communicative competence. Then the question is how students can develop it such a way. Since Japan is a 'Monolingual' society (Kato & Kumagai, 2020; Turnbull, 2020), it is beneficial for students to learn different cultures through English language classes. Through English as the global language, getting to know the different cultures of peoples is a unique tool in achieving these goals (Ke, 2015). In addition to the above, Alptekin's (2002) statement reveals that learning a foreign language encourages enculturation, and that learners can experience a new worldview through learning a foreign language. Moreover, Alptekin (2002) considered the purpose of language learning as integration of language and culture. Takeda et al. (2006) suggested the idea that different perspectives of cultural differences promote cultural awareness, however, they concluded that cultural awareness is not focused on in high school English textbooks.

This study examines the roles of the main characters and storytellers in the textbook. Since previous studies showed there has already been a tendency to give the Japanese more dominant roles, this study tries to uncover what are the expectations or intentions in which validity of the selection of them along with the field they engage. This study also investigates non-Japanese people. Matsuda (2002) reported that most main characters other than from Japan, were people from inner circle countries and people or topics from expanding circle countries rarely appeared. This study tries to find out whether this tendency is still held in the textbook now in use. Representation of non-Japanese people and the varieties of English will be analyzed to discuss to what extent different perspectives are introduced to enhance students' cultural awareness.

MATERIAL

A WIDELY USED GOVERNMENT-APPROVED ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEXTBOOK

The material of this study is the government-approved popular English language textbook '*CROWN English Communication I New Edition*' (Shimozaki et al., 2019) published by the local publisher, Sanseido Press founded in 1881 and with a vast experience in textbook publishing. There are thirty-one government-approved textbooks from thirteen publishers for the course 'English Communication I' which is a compulsory course. Sanseido Press' representative *CROWN* series was first published in 1916. Now Sanseido Press covers all English language textbooks for elementary, junior high, and high school students. According to Naigaikyoikuhenshubu (2021), '*CROWN English communication I New Edition*' (hereinafter *CROWN*) is the second most chosen textbook out of thirty-one textbooks with a market share of 7.4%. In addition to its rich experience in publishing textbooks, *CROWN* has been analysed in many previous studies due to its popularity (Glasgow & Paller, 2014; Matsuda, 2002; Ronci, 2020). Also, the editorial policy says that they pay attention to the national curriculum when it comes to language education, international understanding, and human rights education. The textbook is brightly colored and has a lot of pictures and photos to go with the passages and to catch the students' interest. All texts are adapted and created for the EFL context. Moreover, this textbook is fully stocked with a variety of supplementary teaching materials, ensuring a steady demand in the educational materials market. Moreover, each school can add supplementary learning materials depending on their needs.

STRUCTURE OF THE TEXTBOOK

CROWN includes ten lessons and there are one main text and one Optional Reading in each lesson. Each lesson also has two themes and all sixteen themes are listed in Table 1. In addition to the main lessons, there are also two 'Readings', and one 'Optional Lesson.' The length of the main text varies from 426 words to 898 words with an average of 702 words. The main text is followed by four pages of the exercise section, and two pages of 'Optional Reading' which is related to the main text contained in a lesson. The length of the Optional Readings varies from 283 words to 470 words with an average of 326 words. The exercise section consists of one page of 'Comprehension', 'Your Reaction', 'Grammar', and 'Exercises' respectively. Listening and writing exercises are also included in these sections. Until the end of Lesson 8, there is one page of 'Reading Skill' and 'Sound Studio' in every two lessons. There is one page of 'Comprehension' followed by 'Readings' and 'Optional Lesson.' At the end of the textbook, there are five pages of 'Summary of Grammar' and four pages of sample dialogs for 'Your Reaction' part. The scope of this study is limited to the main texts and Optional Readings of the ten lessons thus the exercise section is excluded.

CONTENTS OF THE TEXTBOOK

Each lesson has two specific themes. Titles and stated themes of the ten lessons are listed in Table 1. The Guideline recommends that both daily life and social topics should be covered in English language education. Most of the themes appeared only once except for 'Way of Life' (four times) and 'Cohesive Society' (twice).

TABLE 1. Titles and themes of the 10 lessons

Lesson Titles (Optional Reading)	Themes(1)

Lesson 1	When Words Won't Work (PictOLYMPIgrams)	Language	(Japanese) culture
Lesson 2	Going into Space (Go Beyond Your Comfort Zone)	Natural Science	Way of Life
Lesson 3	A Canoe Is an Island (Small Boat, Big Ocean)	Traditional culture	Cohesive Society
Lesson 4	Seeing with the Eyes of the Heart (My Father)	Music	Way of Life
Lesson 5	Food Bank (2HJ Volunteers Speak)	Community service	Way of Life
Lesson 6	Roots & Shoots (Message for High School Students)	Environment	Cohesive Society
Lesson 7	Paper Architect (You Built Your House with *What*?)	Architecture	Volunteer
Lesson 8	Not So Long Ago (Images from the Trunk)	Peace	History
Lesson 9	Crossing the "Uncanny Valley" (Are Robots Going to Take Our Jobs?)	Technology	Understanding of Human Nature
Lesson 10	Good Ol' Charlie Brown (The *PEANUT*S Characters)	Art	Way of Life

(1) translated by the author

RESULTS

CONTEXTS AND PEOPLE APPEARED IN THE LESSONS

Tables 2 and 3 show that the contexts of the different situations in the textbook are both Japanese and international. Lesson topics based on local (Japanese) context occupied about half of the topics. As for international context, the U.S., Africa, and Pacific islands appeared as the main context of the lesson topics. The textbook found fourteen countries, two regions, two environments, and four nationalities.

TABLE 2. Contents of the main texts

	Context	Style	Cultural Awareness	Relevance/ Familiarity	Discourse
Lesson 1	Local	Essay	Yes	High/High	Nonnative
Lesson 2	International	Narrative	Yes	High/High	Nonnative
Lesson 3	International	Narrative	Yes	Moderate/ Low	Nonnative
Lesson 4	International	Essay	Yes	Moderate/ High	Nonnative
Lesson 5	Local	Narrative	Yes	High/ High	Native
Lesson 6	International	Interview	Yes	High/ High	Both
Lesson 7	Local	Essay	Yes	Moderate/ Moderate	Nonnative
Lesson 8	Local	Lecture	Yes	High/High	Both
Lesson 9	Local	Essay	Yes	High/High	Nonnative
Lesson 10	International	Essay	Yes	High/High	Native

Context: Is it local (Japanese) or international?
Style: Text genre
Cultural Awareness: Are different cultures seen in the lesson?
Relevance / Familiarity: How relevant or familiar is the content to high school students?
Discourse: Who is speaking? Nonnative and/or native English speakers?

TABLE 3. Contents of the Optional Readings

	Context	Style	Cultural Awareness	Relevance/ Familiarity	Discourse
Lesson 1	Local	Essay	Yes	High/ High	Nonnative
Lesson 2	Local	Narrative	Yes	High/ High	Nonnative
Lesson 3	International	Essay	Yes	Moderate/ Low	Nonnative
Lesson 4	Local	Narrative	Yes	High/ High	Nonnative
Lesson 5	Local	Narrative	Yes	High/ High	Nonnative
Lesson 6	International	Narrative	Yes	High/ High	Native
Lesson 7	Local	Essay	Yes	Moderate/ Moderate	Nonnative
Lesson 8	International	Essay	Yes	High/ High	Both
Lesson 9	Local	Essay	Yes	High/ High	Both
Lesson 10	International	Narrative	Yes	High/ High	Native

Context: Is it local (Japanese) or international?
Style: Text genre
Cultural Awareness: Are different cultures seen in the lesson?
Relevance/Familiarity: How relevant or familiar is the content to high school students?
Discourse: Who is speaking? Nonnative and/ or native English speakers?

Main characters were accompanying various contexts related to their fields. There were total

of seven Japanese people featured and five of them are main characters (Table 4). As for the rest, they were sub characters and their outstanding achievements were marked as important in the texts. Meanwhile, ten people from outside Japan appeared (Table 5). Seven of them were all US citizens. The remaining three characters were from the UK, Vietnam, and Micronesia. Kim Phuc, a Vietnamese, was the only Asian main character other than Japanese.

TABLE 4. Japanese Main Characters

Name	Profession	Field
Koichi Wakata	Astronaut	Space Science
Kanako Uchino	Hawaiian traditional Canoe Crew	Oceanography (Traditional Navigation)
Nobuyuki Tsujii	Pianist	Art (Music)
Shigeru Ban	Architect	Architecture
Hiroshi Ishiguro	Robot Scientist	Technology (Robot Science)

TABLE 5. Non-Japanese characters

Name	Country of origin	Lesson	Role
Nainoa Thompson	The United States (Hawaii)	3 MT	Sub character
Mau Piailug	Federated State of Micronesia	3 MT	Sub character
Mrs. Davidson	The United States	4 MT	Sub character with remark
Charles E. McJilton	The United States	5 MT	Storyteller
Jane Goodall	England	6 MT & OR	Main character, storyteller
Elis Stenman	The United States	7 OR	Sub character as an example
Joe O'Donnell	The United States	8 MT & OR	Main character
David Autor	The United States	9 OR	Sub character with opinions
Kim Phuc	Vietnam	8 MT	Main character
Charles M. Schulz	The United States	10 MT & OR	Main character, storyteller

MT: Main Text, OR: Optional Reading

Charles E. McJilton from the US, a representative of the NPO in Japan played the role of the storyteller simultaneously with the main character in Lesson 5. Lesson 6 contains a conversation between Jane Goodall, a British researcher and a Japanese interviewer. In lesson 10, Charles M. Schultz, a US citizen, the author of the *Peanuts* acted as a storyteller. Two of the main lessons did not have main characters or storytellers. The lesson topics were pictograms and peace. The frequent portrayal of Japanese people can be seen in the textbook. People from outside Japan were assigned almost equal numbers of important roles of main characters or storytellers as Japanese and most of them were US citizens.

STYLE OF THE TEXT

Most of the texts were narrative and explanatory. As for the main texts, there was one interview and one lecture. As for the Optional Readings, there were only two types which are narrative and expository essays. The narrative style is dominant in this textbook (Tables 2 and 3).

CULTURAL AWARENESS

Throughout the textbook, a variety of cultural aspects were embedded in lesson topics. By combining contexts and main characters or storytellers, the textbook successfully contained rich cultural diversity. However, cultures of outer and expanding circle countries other than Japan were rarely represented, there is a concern that students may subconsciously perceive the superiority of the English language and the cultures of the inner circle countries. In terms of varieties of English, the textbook mentioned the difference between British English and American English once. Other than these two varieties, any other varieties have not been mentioned in the textbook.

RELEVANCE AND FAMILIARITY

Most of the lesson topics were relevant and familiar to the lives of high school students (Tables 2 and 3). The textbook enabled students to have familiarity and relevance with different tactical approaches. Topics of cartoons, the Tokyo Olympic Games, and the Great East Japan Earthquake allowed students to feel familiar because they have certain background knowledge therefore it is relatively easier for them to start a discussion. Topics with Japanese characters who are well known in Japanese society also have the same effect because students feel common sense in their stories. There was only one topic of Hawaiian traditional navigation method that was classified as low Familiarity/Relevance, still the Japanese storyteller made it possible to feel relevant by using some local (Japanese) names of the places. In lesson 7 on the other hand, it was the interview with British researcher Jane Goodall and its context is not Japan. Interestingly the interviewer had the name 'Kenji'. Kenji is a typical name for Japanese males. This interviewer was only identified by his name and had no picture. He might be a fictional character however, the textbook might have given the Japanese name intentionally to allow students to reflect themselves in him. It can be said that the textbook maintained a certain level of relevance and familiarity to draw students' interests with various tactical approaches.

DISCOURSE

Only a small portion was given to native discourse and as most of the lessons are narrative therefore communication such as the interaction between people can be hardly found. As for discourse, main texts and Optional Readings gained the same results. Six lessons out of ten were occupied by nonnative discourse, two were found as native discourse, and another two were classified as 'both' discourse where nonnative and native speakers participated. There were four discourses classified as 'both' but only one discourse was interaction. The remaining three discourses were classified as 'both' just because the utterances of native English speakers were embedded in the discourses, thus these were not an interaction between natives and nonnatives. There was no interaction between nonnatives which Alptekin (2002) recommended. Although this course is designed to encourage students to participate in English communication proactively, only a few examples of interaction are found in the textbook. Frequently used colloquial expressions such as fillers and interjections or formulaic expressions could not be found either.

The textbook mentioned the difference between American English and British English. In the interview of lesson 6, The interviewee used British English and it was explained based on American English in the footnote. The interviewee said, "...We could not afford for me *to go to university*..." and it would be rephrased as "go to *the* university" in America (Italicized and underlined by the author). This explanation showed the acknowledgment of different varieties of English. However, other varieties used in outer and expanding circle countries have not been introduced. Such an explanation in an American way might bring the idea that American English is correct and ideal. Moreover, it might make it difficult for students to accept the concept of World Englishes.

DISCUSSION

COMBINATION OF MAIN CHARACTERS/STORYTELLERS AND CONTEXT OF TOPICS

The textbook deliberately brought different cultures and perspectives in various combinations of main characters or storytellers and topics. There were three distinct storytellers (two Japanese, one US citizen) in main texts of the textbook: Koichi Wakata (an astronaut), Kanako Uchino (a Hawaiian canoe crew member), and Charles E. McJilton (a representative of the NPO). The main texts used first-person perspective with these storytellers, the sentences begin with the subject 'I' (e.g. "I have been in space…", "I have always loved the sea.", "…I was a university exchange student…"). Wakata and Uchino introduced their story from a Japanese perspective while McJilton shared his story from a US citizen's view. Japanese storytellers talked about their experience overseas so that their context was categorized as 'international', while a storyteller from the U.S. talked about his activity in Japan thus the context was categorized as 'local (Japanese)'. The textbook successfully covered diverse contexts and perspectives by combining different cultures and people with different backgrounds to enhance students' cultural awareness.

Take, for example, Lesson 3, which is about traditional Hawaiian sea navigation methods as described by Uchino, a Japanese. The topic is unfamiliar to students and the context is based on Hawaiian culture. Yet students can find some local names of the places such as '*Miyake-jima*', '*Okinawa*', and '*Yokohama*' in the text. Both Wakata's and Uchino's stories shared a common approach. Their fields have nothing to do with high school students' daily life, but they introduced a new world by sharing their experiences. It would broaden one's perspective effectively.

Meanwhile, a storyteller McJilton from the U.S. gave his feedback on Japanese society. He established a food bank, *Second Harvest Japan* in Japan. His story highlighted a social issue that many Japanese people overlook. He as a US citizen shed light on the problem of Japanese society through his activity. This would be a great opportunity to learn how non-Japanese see Japanese society.

SEEING THE WORLD FROM A JAPANESE PERSPECTIVE

Japanese main characters and storytellers can be seen as role models for high school students. Their messages have a potential power to get across easily because they share the same cultural background and common sense. The optional Reading of Lesson 2 was a direct message from Japanese astronaut Wakata who is a pioneer in his field giving students advice for their future dreams. For example, it begins with "*a message for high school students from Koichi Wakata*" (translated and underlined by the author) in the Japanese language. In addition, the passage is followed by a full translation of the

message. The insert of the Japanese translation indicates the textbook values the importance of the message. There are some expressions related especially to Japanese students such as "*Japanese archipelago*", "*our country*", and "*Japanese youth*" (translated by the author). These expressions could remind students of their home country Japan. And students would think of their identity as Japanese in English language classes.

In the Optional Reading of Lesson 5, five Japanese volunteer staff of the NPO, *Second Harvest Japan* talked about their activities. Their speeches are full of positive comments on their activity. For example, they used expressions such as "The atmosphere is fun and family-like.", "it's a lot of fun...", "I am very happy...", and "Volunteering is a great opportunity..." Showcasing these individuals who are dedicated to volunteering can be used to encourage students to reflect on their overall contribution to the present and future of society. Volunteers are presented as role models who are close to students in the perception of their worldview. Although one of the volunteer staff said, "...there are many volunteer staff from foreign countries..." none of the staff who are non-Japanese were giving feedback. Nevertheless, as a whole lesson, the combination of the American perspective of the storyteller in the main text and the Japanese perspectives of volunteer staff in the Optional Reading can be seen.

PERSPECTIVES OF PEOPLE WITH DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS

Three non-Japanese represented different contexts, and they played important roles in the textbook, one British, one American, and one Vietnamese. Jane Goodall is a British researcher who studies chimpanzees in Africa. She can be considered as a counterpart role model of Wakata and gave a message to students. It's notable that two different types of people were assigned to give direct messages to high school students. It can be considered an editorial policy to balance. Her message is likely to encourage students to achieve their future dreams and inspire them though, unlike Wakata's, there was no translation. She also jumped into a new place in Africa after growing up in England. Having Goodall as a storyteller made it possible to have a sense that you can leap wherever you want, as she did, she left England for Kenya, if you're fully determined. Her story of how she found a way to make her dream come true since she was a girl would inspire students to plan for their future goals. Even though she is not Japanese, her message will strike a chord with students, subsequently, it might broaden students' perspectives.

On the other hand, the lesson topic of the *Peanuts* is based on the U.S. context. Yet the relevance and familiarity of the content are high. This is because popular cartoons among young people are an attractive topic for students and it is world-famous pop culture. In the beginning of the main text, students are asked why this cartoon is so popular in the world. Students are given opportunities of finding some universalities through learning the fact that the author Charles M. Schulz created this cartoon based on his own experiences from his childhood. They might notice there's no big difference between themselves and people in the U.S. In addition, the inclusion of two of the comic strips would help students not only to notice cultural differences but to observe how English is used in the U.S. However, other than these two comic strips, any authentic English use cannot be found in the textbook.

A Vietnamese Kim Phuc is the only main character who is not either a native English speaker or a Japanese in this textbook. She is presented as a victim of the Vietnam War in Lesson 8 with photos of her. The photo in which a crying small naked Kim Phuc herself is running to get out of the fire tells us how terrible the War was. There is another photo of the victim in this Lesson. It is a Japanese boy carrying his deceased younger sister on his back. This photo was taken by Joe O'Donnell, a US veteran in 1945 during World War II in Nagasaki. This lesson's theme is 'Peace'

and 'History' (Table 1), and students are supposed to learn the value of peace by reading the horrifying and heartbreaking stories of victims. When it comes to the topic of war, the Japanese tend to be described as victims of the atomic bomb. However, a different perspective was brought in. In the following Optional Reading, O'Donnell confessed his mixed feelings as a citizen of the enemy country. He referred to both the injustice of his home country and the terrible things the Japanese army did against China and Korea in wartime. Presumably Japanese and Vietnamese people have in common as victims so they could be juxtaposed sharing similar feelings. This might be one of the possible reasons Kim Phuc was given a chance to speak up in the lesson. It can be considered an important topic for Japanese government-approved textbooks to remind the younger generation of the fact that Japan is the only country that was attacked by an atomic bomb to strengthen students' Japanese identity. Such a topic of war tends to be a one-sided story however, having several storytellers with different backgrounds would help to avoid this. Nevertheless, considering the fact that Kim Phuc was the only non-Japanese main character who comes from the Asian region, the inequality of the nationalities of the actors in the textbook cannot be denied.

EMPHASIS ON THE HEART OF JAPAN

In numerous instances throughout the textbook, accomplishments or contributions made by the Japanese were mentioned. This approach is also distinctive. The disaster, the Great East Japan Earthquake that killed more than twenty thousand people in 2011 was mentioned twice. The news of the nuclear accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant caused by the Tsunami caught attention from all over the world. The recovery process has still been in progress as of 2023. At that time, there must have been lots of international aid such as rescue teams, medical teams, various supplies, donations, prayers, and so on. None of these stories was introduced. Despite this omission, in lesson 7, a Japanese architect Shigeru Ban's contribution to both domestic and international was explained. Stories of the Japanese people's many accomplishments and contributions might serve as a reminder of the need for modesty, perseverance, and kindness. It successfully contributes to making readers proud of being Japanese and their home country Japan. Some achievements by the Japanese people are repeatedly emphasized in the textbook.

Take the Optional Reading of Lesson 1 for example, there is a short paragraph written in the Japanese language as an introduction. It begins, "*Would it be an overstatement to say that the contribution of Japanese designers made it possible to use pictograms in Olympic games?*" (translated by the author). The fact that Japanese designers gave up their rights in order to allow others to use pictograms was described. Similar to the previously discussed disaster topic, this approach focuses solely on the virtue of the Japanese people. Since this is a textbook sanctioned by the Japanese government, it may be logical for it to place a higher focus on Japanese works. However, these representations might be interpreted as the language policy of Japan. On one hand, Japan is eager to master the English language. On the other hand, Japan never surrenders its language, culture, and virtue in exchange for English proficiency.

ENGLISH FOR TEST TAKING, NOT FOR COMMUNICATION PURPOSES

Having many narrative style texts could indicate the teaching style of the English language in Japan is not free from grammar-translation methods. As Takeda et al. (2006) pointed out that the texts required to be modified therefore are not authentic due to the requirements advised by the Guideline. Textbooks need to fulfill the requirements such as the range of vocabulary, certain expressions, and

a word limit. Such requirements might prevent the textbook from including more authentic content such as newspaper articles, websites, and literature. Only after they are exposed to sufficient examples of communication, are they ready for actual communication. However, English language classes seem to put more emphasis on basic grammar and vocabulary for test taking purposes (Samimy & Kobayashi, 2004; Nishino & Watanabe, 2008). The Guideline emphasizes the importance of communicative competence, yet communicative competence is useless when it comes to university admission. English for test taking, especially reading comprehension is the main purpose of English language learning along with the grammar-translation methods (Nishino & Watanabe, 2008). Despite the fact that it is optimal for students to be exposed to a variety of text types other than narrative or explanatory texts, the finding showed that the textbook fails to provide a variety of text genres.

CONCLUSION

The government-approved textbook used various approaches to cultivate students' cultural awareness; combinations of main characters or storytellers and contexts, seeing the world from both Japanese and non-Japanese perspectives, having various role models and lesson topics. However, the findings showed that the textbook presented limited main characters or storytellers. There is an obvious bias towards US citizens and American English. This tendency might instill in students the idea that native speakers' English is the norm or ideal. This gives the impression that the Guideline does not accept the concept of World Englishes. It will be advantageous for students if textbooks include a more diverse context and characters, especially that of outer or expanding circle countries. Given that nonnative English speakers vastly outnumber native English speakers (Ethnologue, 2021), the textbook may have neglected the global dynamics of English.

Previous studies have pointed out a bias towards local (Japanese) topics (Ookawa, 2015), and this trend is seen in this study. It might exemplify the difficulty of making changes in the English education system in Japan. As Morizumi (2012) pointed out some Japanese people have concerns that the English subject might threaten Japanese ideology and values (Aspinall, 2011; Morizumi, 2012). Viewed in this way, it is accountable for the bias towards local (Japanese) topics and the textbook puts stress on Japanese perspectives.

It has been pointed out that there is a discrepancy between the Guideline and classroom realities (Nishino & Watanabe, 2008) and it can be caused by the ambiguous goals of the Guideline. The lack of authenticity contradicts the goal of acquiring communicative competence. To be equipped with communicative competence, the concept of World Englishes or multilingualism should be taken into consideration in English language education in Japan.

This study investigated only one textbook, thus the data is not enough for generalization. However, being a popular government-approved textbook, *CROWN* does not differ much from other MEXT-approved publications. For this reason, a closer examination of the edition in light of the revision of the Guideline is of particular value in terms of empirical as well as applied use in the dissemination of the English language among Japanese students.

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