# The treatment of identities in postwar EFL textbooks for ninth graders

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This paper provides a historical overview of how the identities of the main characters in postwar EFL textbooks for Japanese ninth graders have changed over time and examines these historical changes using a framework of identities. The analysis of textbook characters was structured around the identity domains presented by Ting-Toomey (1999) and the concept of English speakers shown in the Three Circles by Kachru (1985). For this research, the three dimensions of gender identity, role identity, and identities of English-Speaking Cultures were chosen. Data was collected from eleven major textbooks published in 1949, 1972, 1993, and 2006. The study revealed that the 1993 texts contained drastic changes in textbook characters as compared to earlier generations of the textbook. It was also found that the 2006 textbooks featured more real-life characters engaged with current world concerns such as human rights. The study suggests real-life characters may provide diversified role models for students.

　本研究は、戦後の中学校英語の教科書に登場した主人公がどのような歴史的変遷を辿ったかをアイデンティティの枠組みを通して探求した。学習指導要領改訂の直後に出版された1949年版、1972年版、1993年版、そして最新の2006年版の中学三年生の教科書計11冊を調査対象とした。調査に用いたのは、ジェンダー、役割、英語話者文化圏の三つのアイデンティティの枠組みである。これはTing-Toomey　(1999)のアイデンティティの領域とKachru　(1985)のThree　Circlesを基にした。大きな変化が見られたのは1993年版である。2006年版では基本的人権などに関る問題に取り組んでいる実在の人物がより多く登場するようになった。こうした人物についての記述を通して、生徒は多様な役割を担う人間像を知る機会を得ることができる。

**T**his study examined postwar Ministry of Education authorized textbooks for English as a foreign language (EFL) used by Japanese ninth graders with a focus on the treatment of textbook characters. Data was collected from a total of eleven major textbooks published in the following four years: 1949, 1972, 1993, and 2006.

While research on English textbooks in Japan before and after World War II has been reported from time to time, few studies have looked at changes in textbook characters using a framework of identities. The primary purpose of this research was to frame the historical transition of the sixty postwar years by investigating the identities of the main characters in Japanese EFL school textbooks. A secondary purpose was to discover how textbook characters reflect social changes in real life over time. The writer of this paper felt that the recent publication of the textbooks in April 2006 provided a good opportunity to share the outcomes of this research with educators and other concerned parties, because some of them might be interested in the historical transition of EFL textbook characters.

## Authorization of textbooks

Postwar English textbooks for junior high schools in Japan have had a unique history as a result of the system of guidance and approval by the Ministry of Education in textbook design and production. Publishers in the private sector have worked under these constraints. The government website provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2005) explains this as follows:

> The School Education Law enacted in 1947 created the current system of textbook approval. (Until the end of World War II, the government generally authored textbooks.) In this system, nongovernmental publishers create textbooks and submit them for official examination and approval by the Ministry of Education. These books must meet the requirements of the Curriculum Guideline, a set of curriculum standards for Japanese schools; beyond this, however, the publishers have freedom to include their own learning methods and ideas in the material. (p. 1)

This statement suggested two important issues for consideration. One issue is the four-year publication cycle because of the approval system by the government. After the end of World War II, the government opened the market to the private sector and allowed publishers to edit and publish textbooks for junior high school. However, the government retained the approval system, sustained by a four-year publication cycle. The system of this cycle works as follows: after textbook writers and editors in the publishing companies complete their final drafts, the council representing the Ministry of Education approves the content. Next, local boards of education (for public schools) and principals (for national or private schools) determine which textbooks will be printed (and the quantity of each). Finally, the actual textbooks are delivered to each school. Because the approval and distribution takes a set period of four years, some topics related to the current events in the real world are no longer fresh to the teenage users by the time the textbooks reach them.

The other issue is the influence of the Curriculum Guidelines, commonly called the Course of Study, that influences the content of textbooks. This first started with guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education suggesting initially that English was to be taught as an opportunity for foreign language activity, which with the years extended to cultivate positive attitude towards communication. The early

postwar Course of Study (1951) mentioned that learning English was "to develop a practical basic knowledge of English as 'speech' with primary emphasis on aural-oral skills and the learning of structural patterns through learning experiences conductive to mastery in hearing, oral expression, reading and writing…" (p. 14). The evident changes can be seen in the Course of Study (1969) extending it to "lay the foundations of international understanding" (p. 193). Later, the aim of "fostering a positive attitude toward communication" (1989, p. 96) was added to the text of the Course of Study. Most recently, it has been embodied as "to develop students' basic practical communication abilities" (1998, p. 1). Although textbook writers had the freedom to include their own ideas, the materials in textbooks needed to meet the requirements of the Course of Study, and had to be authorized by the government committee. It is not surprising that publishers avoided the risk of including controversial characters in textbooks or stories that could create negative responses from the government.

### The concept of identity in this study

Since this research examines the identities of EFL textbook characters, it is important to first of all define what the basic concept of identity is and how it is used in this study. The basic concept of identity concerns the question of who we are (Martin & Nakayama, 2000, p. 111). As Erikson has remarked, identity can be recognized as a process located in the core of the individual and the core of the communal culture surrounding oneself (1968, pp. 22-23). In other words, identity is how a person recognizes oneself and the sense of how one is perceived by people related to oneself.

Although identity was originally a psychological term used to explain the state of self and interaction with the surrounding world, the term has extended its meaning to other fields of study including intercultural communication. Ting-Toomey (1999) categorized identity into eight primary identity domains (p. 29). Among these, this research focused on the following three domains which were chosen to frame EFL textbook characters:

- Cultural identity - the sense of belonging to a culture

- Gender identity - self-image and expected other-images concerning femaleness and maleness

- Role identity - expected behaviors or values that have to do with ourselves.

The other domains of identity included in her framework are ethnic identity, personal identity, relational identity, facework identity, and symbolic interaction identity.

In this research, the word "identity" will primarily be used at the personal level to indicate a sense of self. However, when the plural form of "identities" is used, it will be discussed from the more dynamic perspective of situational or social dimension.

### Literature review

In his research on postwar junior high school English textbooks, Erikawa (1992, p. 130) commented on the appearance of the U.S. or U.K. ethnic characters as well as characters from Asian and African countries in the 1980s. His quantitative study covered fifty-four textbooks and raised awareness of the changes over time of textbook

characters. These began with a focus on people living in the U.S. in the 1949 textbooks to portray international society, including Japanese, by the 1990 generation of texts.

The concept of English as a language used in the international settings was presented by Kachru in 1985. As shown in Figure 1, Crystal (2003) clearly explained Kachru's categorization of English speakers into three circles: "the *inner circle* refers to the traditional bases of English, where it is the primary language"(e.g., the U.S., U.K.), "the *outer* or *extended circle* involves the earlier phases of the spread of English in non-native settings, …and plays an important 'second language' role in a multilingual setting" (e.g., India, Singapore), and "the *expanding circle* involves those nations which recognize the importance of English as an international language…taught as a foreign language"(e.g., Japan, China) (p. 107).

Based on Kachru's Three Circles, Yamanaka (2006) presented the results of research on the nationalities of English textbook characters in a total of nineteen Japanese junior and senior high school textbooks (p. 61). She found, at the junior high school entry level, a focus on textbook characters from countries of the Inner circle. The next level extended to topics related to Japan. Finally, by the entry level of senior high school, countries in the Expanding circle were portrayed (p. 70).
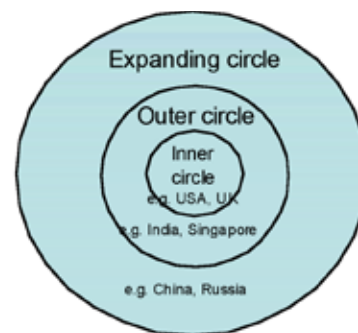


**Figure 1. The Three Circles**

**From The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language (p.107) by David Crystal, 2003**

### Methodology

In collecting the data for this research, textbooks were chosen from private sector publications used under the Japanese secondary education system established after the end of World War II. Eleven textbooks were selected from the periods immediately after the major revisions of the Course of Study, namely those published in 1949, 1972, and 1993. For the latest generation of texts, the writer utilized books published in 2006.

Textbooks from three of the existing six main EFL publishers in Japan were selected. These were Kairyudo, Sanseido, and Tokyo Shoseki. There were two reasons for this selection. First, the total market share of these three publishers added up to nearly 90% in 2002 according to *Kyokasho Report* 2002 (Textbook Report 2002, p. 82), a

monthly journal issued by a publishers' union in Japan. Second, all three publishers have continually provided junior high school textbooks from 1972 to the present. Table 1 lists details and abbreviations of the eleven textbooks selected.

### Table 1. EFL textbooks examined

| Publication Year | Kairyudo | Sanseido | Tokyo Shoseki |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1949 | Jack and Betty: English Step by Step 3rd Step **(JB1949)** | The New Vista English Readers Junior III **(NV1949)** | |
| 1972 | New Prince English Course 3 **(NP1972)** | Total English Junior Crown Series 3 **(TE1972)** | New Horizon English Course 3 **(NH1972)** |
| 1993 | Sunshine English Course 3 **(SS1993)** | New Crown English Series 3 **(NC1993)** | New Horizon English Course 3 **(NH1993)** |
| 2006 | Sunshine English Course 3 **(SS2006)** | New Crown English Series 3 **(NC2006)** | New Horizon English Course 3 **(NH2006)** |

Three identity domains were specified to code the characters from each unit of the textbooks. Gender identity and role identity were adopted from Ting-Toomey (1999, p. 29). The category of identities of English-Speaking Cultures was based on Ting-Toomey's concept of cultural identity and on Kachru's Three Circles charted out as Figure 1 in this paper. Using Kachru's concept helped re-organize the main characters in the texts into distinct groups of English speakers. However, instead of Kachru's

distinction of grouping together speakers of English as a second language, this research made a separate category for textbook characters who were Japanese EFL speakers. There were two reasons for creating the new category. One was that the number of Japanese characters in the textbooks have increased recently. The other was that most textbook writers, editors, and users were Japanese. Thus, the three groups were re-categorized as native speakers of English, Japanese EFL speakers, and other speakers of English.

This study involved qualitative research, and it focused on the variety of textbook characters through the framework of three identity domains. After conducting a pilot study on a series of textbooks from four different time periods of one publisher, the category coding was extended to textbooks from the other two publishers.

## Results and discussion

The results of my analysis are reported in three perspectives. First, it will deal with general trends according to the historical timeline of textbook production. Next, the writer will describe features of real-life characters and of the students in Japan who use these textbooks. Finally, there will be a discussion of the results.

### General trends concerning the three identity domains

In the 1949 textbooks, the presence of males as main characters was dominant in terms of gender identity, historical figures such as Abraham Lincoln in two textbooks (JB1949, p. 67 and NV1949, p. 22) were prominent in terms of role identity. The settings in these textbooks were focused

mainly on Anglo-Saxon societies in terms of identities of English-Speaking Cultures.

Twenty years later, in 1972, although women characters are portrayed, they are solely portrayed as housewives and mothers, who have to rely on men (TE1972, p. 102 and NH1972, p. 77). For role identity, nuclear families were popular. As for identities of English-Speaking Cultures, episodes of Japanese characters including Ryoichi, a boy who loved pearls in a Japanese legend (TE1972, p. 88), were illustrated. Japanese culture had appeared in EFL textbooks by this time.

Another twenty years later, in 1993, gender fair language came into use in terms of gender identity in such cases as *fire fighter* instead of *fireman* and *chairperson* instead of *chairman* (SS1993, p. 114). In terms of role identity, professionals in the real world and ethnic leaders could be seen. Martin Luther King, Jr. (NC1993, p. 59) is a good example of both features. As for identities of English-Speaking Cultures, William Adams, who later became the Japanese Miura Anjin (SS1993, p. 19), exemplified how Japanese culture was treated in textbooks. EFL here was viewed as a language for intercultural communication as in the example of a textbook unit in which opinions were presented from teenage residents in Japan. Their ethnic identities were Dutch, Swiss, Brazilian, and Indian (NH1993, pp. 48-53).

Finally, in 2006, women in professions previously thought to be male-dominant could be recognized, such as Ogata Sadako, a former United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (NC2006, p. 81). Environmental issues and human rights took on more importance, and children began speaking as global members equal to adults in terms of role identity. A prominent character embodying such elements was twelve-year-old Severn Cullis-Suzuki, a Japanese-Canadian whose father's ancestors came from Japan. This girl delivered a speech at the Earth Summit in 1992 as an environmental activist, requesting adults to take action against poverty and environmental destruction (SS2006, p. 82 and NH2006, p. 62). In case of *New Horizon English Course 3*, it was described in a column in Japanese which was attached to the main section in English illustrating Rachel Carson (NH2006, pp. 59-61).

In terms of identities of English-Speaking Cultures, the portrayal of Cathy Freeman (SS2006) was a milestone in two respects. One was that she possessed more than one identity, which became widely known to the world when she carried both the Australian and Aboriginal flags during her victory lap in the Sydney Olympics. The other was the use of the word "identity" itself in a text for ninth graders (p. 67). None of the textbooks four years earlier had included this word. Its inclusion at the junior high school level indicates an awareness of identity issues among the textbook writers.

Figure 2 describes how the three types of identity of characters have complexly developed in EFL textbooks in Japan. This image is based on Kachru's Three Circles explained earlier. Identities in 1949 started out simply, but today, characters exist in a world of greater male-female coexistence, and in societies with multiple roles and multiple ethnic cultures. Textbook characters have thus developed more complex roles and identities when compared to the past.
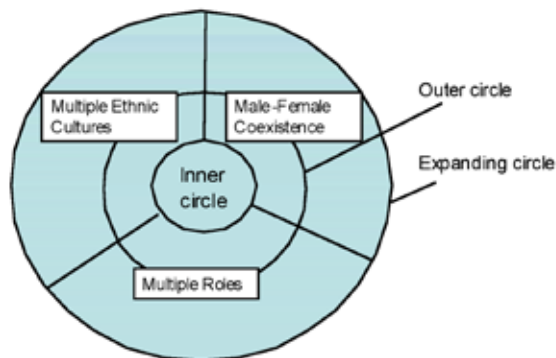
**Figure 2. The Three Identities in the 2006 generation of textbooks based on Kachru's Three Circles. Adapted from *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* (p. 107) by David Crystal, 2003**

### Real-life characters

Among the general trends explained, only non-fictional real-life characters will be highlighted here to develop a clear profile of historical changes. The definition of a real-life character in this paper is a person who actually exists or existed in the past. All imaginary fictional characters are excluded in this section (see Appendix 1).

In the 1949 textbooks, Anglo-Saxon male individuals were prominent real-life characters. Examples are George Stephenson, a British inventor of the first locomotive engine (NV1949, p. 40), or the Pilgrim Fathers, a group who crossed the Atlantic from England and created a community in the 17th century North America (NV1949, p. 46). In the 1972

generation appeared women such as Clara Barton who established the American Red Cross (NH1972, p. 85) or Japanese men such as John Manjiro, a 19th century Edo-period fisherman who became a cross-cultural interpreter (NP1972, p. 31). However, the 1993-generation of texts was epoch-making because a Russian astronaut whose name was not mentioned (SS1993, p. 47) made an appearance in the textbook as a real-life celebrity. The end of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union allowed textbook writers, editors, and the textbook authorization committee to include topics such as this, which were untouchable until the détente between East and West. People from our real world and yet not typically seen in classrooms were introduced in 2006 textbooks. Good examples are the refugee children who had to leave their schools and houses (NC2006, p. 78) and soccer-fan students in Brazil (SS2006, p. 86).

Reading stories about real-life characters in Appendix 1 in an EFL setting extends students' educational opportunities to learn about people who are not mentioned in world history classes. An EFL textbook lesson on Louis Braille (NH2006, p. 5) and the use of his reading system for people who are sightless is a good example of a topic that connects past and present.

### Japanese student characters as textbook hosts

In the 1993 generation of textbooks, a group of male and female Japanese ninth graders appeared for the first time as fictional main characters to "host" the textbooks. Their group often included non-Japanese students such as exchange students from other countries or teenagers residing with their families in Japan. Today, in 2006, all three books used in this

research introduced such main characters with illustrations at the beginning of each book (NC2006, p. ii, NH2006, p. v, and SS2006, p. ii).

The concept of male and female main characters was already established back in 1949 with the "Jack and Betty" series (JB1949). However, the difference is that, by 2006, a variety of people came to be portrayed in the three kinds of textbooks, with cultural backgrounds including American, British, Australian, Canadian, Chinese, Indian, Japanese, and Tanzanian.

## Discussion

The purpose of this research was to examine how textbook characters reflect social changes in the real world. The results indicate that, by 2006, there had been progress in balancing gender identities and portraying a considerable number of characters with diversified role identities. However, for identities of English-Speaking Cultures, not many characters were shown from EFL countries other than those from Japan, China, and Nepal. More EFL characters from countries other than northeast Asia need to be considered as options.

Another issue is that characters with the same background are sometimes used in different textbooks. One typical example is the theme of a Japanese girl whose death was caused by the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. The three publishers adopted different stories, one of which was about Sadako, the girl who made a thousand origami cranes (NC2006, p. 30). These different lessons all resulted in illustrating a quiet girl from Hiroshima struck by the bomb dying without showing fear of death. However, suppose

a student whose relative died in the bombing of Nagasaki wondered why he had to miss the chance of learning and talking in English about his hometown. In order to meet local needs, there should be variation in materials, especially in the case of lessons linked to peace education.

In the peace education section of the electronic journal for EFL teaching, Duffy (1999) states that "peace education is concerned with helping learners to develop awareness of the processes and skills that are necessary for achieving understanding, tolerance, and good-will in the world today" (p. 2). The concept of peace is an important yet emotional topic for students. One of the approaches to raise their awareness is to absorb themselves in reading about real-life experiences and personal histories. Thus, teachers are in the position to assist and nurture their development by introducing proper materials depending on the levels and interests of the students.

To help students participate in thinking about the real world, I would like to suggest a related student research task that gives students the opportunity to discover real-life dramas and hidden histories. The procedure is as follows. Using Appendix 1, the teacher asks students to decide on a real-life character that interests them most at the beginning of the term. The teacher instructs them to write a short report on that character by the end of the term. Students can do research at the libraries or on websites recommended for the task.

This task could help students discover the history of their favorite character and at the same time contribute to improving their reading and writing skills in English. What is important is to let students generate their own research achievements in English and familiarize themselves with real-life characters.

## Conclusion

This paper investigated the treatment of the identities of the main characters in eleven postwar English textbooks for Japanese junior high schools. In 1949, EFL textbooks focused on the values of male-dominant, Anglo-Saxon cultures. The turning point was the 1993-generation of texts, when characters featured a greater degree of diversity of identities of gender, role, and English-Speaking Cultures. By 2006, textbooks portrayed more real-life characters having memorable achievements.

Through this study, we have revisited highlights of the past sixty years of history of EFL in Japan. Under restricted circumstances, textbook writers and publishers appear to have progressed in molding main characters that could interest junior high school students. However, there still remains room for the inclusion of characters with more diversified backgrounds. Lives of celebrities could be educational, but characters representing local legends are also significant for students to encourage themselves beyond the level of mechanically developing practical skills. If they have chances to broaden their minds through these living examples, some of them may have stronger motivations toward learning English and their own cultures at the same time.

Another improvement could be made by including attractive characters with rich experiences that could stimulate students' interest in the diverse cultures around the globe. Teenagers are willing to open the door to unknown worlds, and characters in textbooks can sometimes be good role models for cultivating future careers. Even if their choices of occupation are not directly influenced by the characters in their textbooks, reading about various kinds of role models can help students imagine how other people think and act.

My hope is that the current six EFL publishers in Japan will continue to evolve, thereby providing interesting stories with well-balanced characters. It is hoped that encountering various human lives through the study of English will inspire our students to cultivate their future dreams.

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**JALT2006 — Community, Identity, Motivation**

## Appendix 1 Real-Life Characters From Junior High School EFL Textbooks As of April 17, 2007

| | L1 Characters (native English speakers) | | Japanese Characters | | L2 Characters Other than Japanese | | Others |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | |
| 1949 | Abraham Lincoln (JB)(NV) <br> Pilgrim Fathers (NV) <br> Robert Fulton (NV) <br> George Stephenson (NV) <br> The inventor of summertime (NV) <br> British people (NV) | | | | A Swiss monk who started a community chest (NV) | | |
| 1972 | Sir Rowland Hill (NP) <br> Thomas Edison (TE) <br> Houdini, the magician (TE) | Clara Barton (NH) | John Manjiro (NP) | | Giotto (NH) <br> Archimedes (NH) | | |
| 1993 | Joey & John (SS) <br> William Adams (SS) <br> 45 singers in "Love Is Action" (SS) <br> American Astronaut (SS) <br> Martin Luther King (NC) | Rosa Parks (NC) | Dr. Kawahara (SS) <br> Miura Anjin (SS) <br> (Japanese name of William Adams) | | Russian Astronaut (SS) <br> Saudi Arabian Astronaut (SS) <br> King Solomon (SS) | | |
| 2006 | Martin Luther King (NC) <br> Kevin Carter, photographer (NC) <br> Bill Crowley, rakugo-ka (NH) | Mrs. Rosa Parks (NC) <br> Rachel Carson (NH) <br> Cathy Freeman (SS) <br> Severn Suzuki (SS) (NH) | Saito Sensei (SS) <br> Mr. Kimura (SS) <br> High school teacher and his students who sent soccer balls to Iraq (SS) <br> THE BOOM, singers (SS) <br> Hoshino Michio, nature photographer (NH) | Sasaki Sadako (NC) <br> Ogata Sadako (NC) | Alfred Casero, Argentine singer (SS) <br> Louis Braille (NH) <br> Refugee children (NC) | | Doctors and teachers who help refugees (NC) |

Abbreviations of Textbook Titles: (JB) Jack and Betty, (NV) New Vista, (NP) New Prince, (TE) Total English, (NC) New Crown, (NH) New Horizon, (SS) Sunshine

The name order of Japanese characters in the 2006 generation of textbooks is family name followed by personal name.