

Representation of English users and uses in university EFL textbooks

Keywords

English users, English uses, representation, EFL textbooks, inner circle, outer circle, expanding circle

This study explores the representation of English users and uses in two EFL textbook series used at Japanese universities. Analysis of the characters, the contexts, and the varieties of English used suggests that the textbooks emphasize the inner circle (Kachru, 1985). Users and uses from the outer and expanding circles are extremely limited, despite the growing spread of English outside of the inner circle (Graddol, 1997). The results indicate the representation of English users and uses from the three circles is extremely limited and insufficient to raise students' awareness and facilitate their English development. Both textbook series represent males and females equally and accurately; however greater variety in gender interaction is needed. Although student feedback was solicited, students declined to participate. More research is needed in this area to determine the potential effects textbooks have on students' perceptions of English users and uses.

本論では、日本の大学で使われている2冊のESLテキストブックの中の英語使用者と英語使用の描写について調査した。登場人物、コンテキスト、様々な英語使用の分析から、テキストブックがインナーサークルを強調していると示唆する。インナーサークルの外側における英語の増加にもかかわらず、アウターサークル、また、それよりさらに外側のサークルの英語使用者および使用の描写は極度に限定されている。これら3つのサークルからの英語の使用と使用の描写は極度に限定されており、学生の意識を向上させ、英語力を増進させるには不十分の結果を得ている。

どちらのテキストブックでも男性と女性は公平に正確に描かれている。しかし、よりバラエティに富んだ両性間のやりとりも必要とされる。学生の英語使用者と使用に対する認識にテキストブックが持つ潜在的な効果を確定するには、この分野におけるより詳細な研究が求められる。

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ALTHOUGH English is the current *lingua franca* of international business, aviation, science, and technology, and has displaced French as the *lingua franca* of diplomacy since World War I, it is sometimes perceived as the language exclusive to countries within the inner circle (IC; i.e., Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States) (Kachru, 1985). English learners from expanding circle (EC) countries (e.g., Japan, Brazil, etc.) primarily learn English as a foreign language (EFL) as a means for international, rather than intranational communication, unlike outer circle countries (OC; i.e., former colonies and territories of both the U.K. and U.S.) where English is learned as a second language (ESL). As a result, many Japanese learners of English, particularly adolescents, view English as belonging to primarily Americans and the British, although according to Graddol (1997) "...it will be those who speak English as a second or foreign language who will determine its world future" (p. 5). This skewed view by Japanese learners of English may be partially due to the representation of English users and uses within EFL textbooks approved by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) for use during the first year of junior high school (Matsuda, 2002).

According to Matsuda (2002), the unrealistic view of English users and uses held by Japanese students is problematic for several reasons. First, students will be unable to take advantage of the international opportunities English affords if they do not realize how widely English is used among non-native speakers. Secondly, students may experience great difficulty, confusion, or even resistance in situations when communicating with speakers from the OC. Finally, students' language acquisition may be negatively impacted because of their limited knowledge of English users and uses.

Matsuda (2002) analyzed all seven MEXT approved textbooks in use from April 1997 to March 2002, not only because those English texts were required for public junior high schools, but also because many private schools choose to follow the national curriculum. Her analysis involved identifying the nationality of the main characters (the users) and counting the number of words uttered by each character, then identifying the countries in which these main characters used English (the use).

Language use was differentiated between intranational and international uses. Intranational use was then categorized as occurring between speakers from either IC, OC, or EC countries. International use was categorized as occurring between native speakers only, native and non-native speakers, or non-native speakers only.

Matsuda's (2002) study yielded several findings. First, the main characters were largely from IC countries, which may give students the impression that people from those countries are the dominant users of English. Second, the most common context for English use was in Japan, and an emphasis on the use of English within IC countries and Japan rather than the use of English in OC and EC countries. Third, international use was more common than intranational use. Fourth, the majority of intranational use occurred among English users from IC countries, which reinforces the idea that English is most closely associated with IC users and countries. And finally, the overwhelming majority of international use occurred between native speakers and non-native speakers, which gives the impression that non-native speakers only use English to communicate with speakers from IC countries.

Based on these findings, Matsuda (2002) reached three conclusions: (a) the textbooks emphasized users and uses from IC countries, while users and uses in other contexts had limited and sporadic representation; (b) the similarities between the students' perceptions and the textbooks' representations suggest that these EFL textbooks may influence the construction of students' attitudes and perceptions toward English; and (c) the limited view provided by these texts is inadequate in preparing students to use English with other non-native speakers.

Interestingly enough, Watanabe (1995) noted junior high school English textbooks in Japan have been utilizing characters and topics from non-inner circle countries as a means to promote multicultural awareness. Yet this may not be enough, as the Japanese perception of English dominance is "reinforced by the general public's uncritical and unconscious acceptance of the status quo" (Kubota, 1998, p. 300).

Although Matsuda (2002) focused on the sociolinguistic representation within MEXT approved textbooks, student perceptions of English users and uses within these textbooks were not included. In a later study, Matsuda (2003) did analyze perceptions of English ownership among Japanese secondary school students, but did not make a direct connection with the MEXT approved textbooks from her earlier study. In addition to eliciting student

feedback, it seemed necessary to expand upon Matsuda's (2002) study by analyzing commercially marketed textbooks used in Japan, as others have suggested textbooks should promote equal gender representation and portrayal (Kanamaru, 1998; Beebe, 1998; Ansary & Babii, 2003).

Methodology

Textbook selection

ESL/EFL textbooks offered by major publishers, such as Oxford, Pearson Longman, and Cambridge are commonly used in English classes at universities throughout Japan. The *English firsthand* series from Pearson Longman consists of four textbooks and workbooks. The first textbook is *English firsthand access* (EF A; Helgesen, Brown, & Wiltshier, 2006), which is designed for students with rudimentary English abilities. The second textbook is *English firsthand success* (EF S; Helgesen, Brown, & Wiltshier, 2006), designed for basic communication courses. The third is *English firsthand 1* (EF 1; Helgesen, Brown, & Mandeville, 2007), designed for intermediate level students, and the final text in the series is *English firsthand 2* (EF 2; Helgesen, Brown, & Mandeville, 2007), designed for upper-intermediate or lower-advanced students. Although these texts are intended for English communication courses, they do incorporate all of the four skills.

English users in the *English firsthand* series are not represented by photos of real people, but rather cartoon characters. Because of this, a second textbook series using real people to represent English users needed to be considered, so the *Touchstone* series from Cambridge was chosen. Like *English firsthand*, *Touchstone* is a four textbook and workbook series (TS 1, McCarthy, McCarthen, & Sandiford, 2005; TS 2, McCarthy, McCarthen, & Sandiford, 2005; TS 3, McCarthy, McCarthen, & Sandiford, 2006; & TS 4, McCarthy, McCarthen, & Sandiford, 2006) that incorporates all of the four skills, but is primarily for communication courses. The textbooks range in difficulty from beginner to intermediate.

Analysis

Following Matsuda's (2002) study of MEXT approved texts, the representations of English users and uses in the conversation sections of EF A, EF S, EF 1, EF 2, TS 1, TS 2, TS 3, and TS 4 were analyzed. The conversation sections were chosen, as they were often the only segment from each unit in which interaction between characters in the books took place. Unlike the texts in Matsuda's study, the characters in the *English firsthand* and *Touchstone* series are not built around several or a few central

characters. Instead, each unit is organized around a central theme, with the characters playing a minor part (see Appendixes A through I for more information). In addition, *English firsthand* characters are usually not presented with names or nationalities, while *Touchstone* uses a variety of names designed to reflect the ethnicity of the characters. However, the ethnicities represented by the characters' visual depictions are not always mirrored in the audio tracks (e.g., an Indian character speaks with a very strong American English accent).

Since the majority of characters examined were members of IC countries and their conversations appeared to take place within IC contexts, these texts were analyzed slightly differently than in Matsuda (2002). Each conversation was examined for the following:

- The gender of the characters.
- The gender interaction between the characters.
- The background of the characters (i.e., IC, OC, or EC).
- The ethnicity of the characters.
- The accent of the characters.

To determine the reliability of the analysis, four other university-level English instructors, three from IC countries (Australia, New Zealand, and the United States) one from Japan, were asked to analyze the conversations using the same criteria. Inter rater agreement for all raters was 1.00 for character gender, interaction, background, and ethnicity. However, inter-rater agreement for character accent was 0.82.

Unit conversations were also examined for gender portrayal. Overall, it was agreed that both series were appropriately diverse in their portrayal of men and women (e.g., women are shown asking men on a date, men are shown cooking dinner). As a result, it was felt no further analysis was necessary in this area. Table 1 provides an example of a unit from each series.

Student feedback

30 university students (15 using *English firsthand*, 15 using *Touchstone*) were randomly chosen and asked to give feedback to questions regarding the sociolinguistic and gender representation of characters portrayed in the conversation sections

Table 1. Example conversations from *English firsthand access* and *Touchstone*

	EFA Unit 5		TS1 Unit 4	
Topic	Describing people.		Saying more than yes or no.	
Situation	A man and a woman are on the street. The woman is waving to someone driving away on a motorcycle.		A woman is sitting next to a man in a coffee shop. They have textbooks on the table in front of them.	
Dialog	M:	Who's that?	Tina:	Hi. I see you here all the time. Do you come here every day?
	F:	My sister.	Rey:	No...Well, I have breakfast here before class.
	M:	Really? Is that her motorcycle?	Tina:	Oh, are you a student?
	F:	Yeah. Do you like it?	Rey:	Yes. I'm a law student.
	M:	It's great. What does she do?	Tina:	Really? I'm in the business school.
	F:	She's a musician.	Rey:	Yes. I'm a law student.
	M:	So what's she like?	Rey:	Oh. So do you live around here?
	F:	She's really shy.	Tina:	Well, I live about 20 miles away, in Laguna Beach.
			Rey:	So, are you from California?
			Tina:	Well, I'm from Chicago originally, but my family lives here now.

via e-mail. Although none of the students chose to participate, acquiring student feedback is crucial to understanding student perceptions of English ownership. This was a limitation of Matsuda's (2002) study and is also a major weakness in this study.

Results and discussion

Character gender

As indicated by Table 2, all textbooks contained nearly the same number of males and females and were appropriately diverse with respect to gender portrayal.

Character gender interaction

As Table 3 indicates, the majority of gender interaction occurs between characters of the opposite sex. It is interesting to note that the lower levels of the EF series consist mostly of male/female interaction, while the higher levels contain more same-sex interaction. The TS series has more male/female interaction, but also has more multiple character interactions, unlike the EF series which is limited to interactions between two characters. However, portraying interaction as being mostly male/female may be misleading.

Character background

Because nationalities were not included, character background was obtained by examination of each character's name, physical attributes, and accent to determine whether they were from an IC, OC, or EC country.

Table 4 shows that the majority of characters were from IC countries. No characters were from OC countries, while only eight characters were determined to be from an EC country. From a critical analysis perspective, it would seem the disproportionate number of English users from IC countries may be reinforcing the idea of English dominance by the IC (Matsuda, 2002). This is problematic as the widespread usage of English in OC countries and EC countries is under-represented in the textbooks analyzed. In addition, characters with the potential to represent speakers from OC countries (e.g., an Indian male in TS 1, Unit 9) almost always spoke with strong general American English (GAE) accents, which may also promote student perceptions of IC dominance.

Indians, which represent the largest number of OC English users, are the most under-represented. From a critical perspective, it could be argued the textbooks are reinforcing the image of Caucasians as native speakers of English and the learning of English as necessary to communicate with them. This is problematic, as dominant portrayal of the Caucasian English user may not promote multicultural use of English. More than any other representation of English users and uses, this may be the most troubling.

Character accent

Table 6 demonstrates that the majority of characters spoke with a GAE accent, while other IC accents were under-represented. Despite the presence of

Table 2. Character gender for *English firsthand access, success, 1, 2, and Touchstone 1-4*

Gender	EF A	EF S	EF 1	EF 2	TS 1	TS 2	TS 3	TS 4
Male	11	13	12	11	13	12	12	15
Female	13	11	12	13	14	12	12	11
Total	24	24	24	24	27	24	24	26

Table 3. Character Gender Interaction for *English firsthand access, success, 1, 2, and Touchstone 1-4*

Interaction	EF A	EF S	EF 1	EF 2	TS 1	TS 2	TS 3	TS 4
Male/Female	9	11	8	7	9	10	10	9
Male/Male	1	1	2	2	0	1	1	1
Female/Female	2	0	2	3	0	1	1	0
Male/Male/Female	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
Male/Female/Female	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Total	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12

several Asian characters, very few Asian accents were present. The preponderance of GAEs dovetails nicely with Matsuda's (2003) observation that Japanese students are unaware of varieties of English other than those from the US or UK. She states, "Such Western dominance in their view of English speakers may have been (re)constructed by the way textbooks represent the language and its culture" (p. 488).

Although many textbook series feature either American or British English, gradual exposure to other accents may be beneficial in preparing

students to communicate with a variety of English speakers and a variety of accents. Using a variety of English accents may better prepare Japanese students for the realities of English users and uses outside of Japan.

Conclusion

It seems the *English firsthand* and *Touchstone* textbooks have the potential to reinforce student perceptions of English as belonging to native English speakers (Matsuda, 2002), especially those from the United States. From a critical standpoint, this

Table 4. Character background for *English firsthand access, success, 1, 2,* and *Touchstone 1-4*

Character	EF A	EF S	EF 1	EF 2	TS 1	TS 2	TS 3	TS 4
IC	21	23	24	24	25	23	24	25
OC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
EC	3	1	0	0	2	1	0	1
Total	24	24	24	24	27	24	24	26

Table 5. Character ethnicity for *English firsthand access, success, 1, 2,* and *Touchstone 1-4*

Ethnicity	EF A	EF S	EF 1	EF 2	TS 1	TS 2	TS 3	TS 4
Caucasians	21	11	21	23	15	13	12	11
African Americans	1	3	1	0	4	4	3	5
Latin Americans	0	1	0	0	3	2	4	5
Asians	2	9	2	1	4	5	5	5
Indians	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Total	24	24	24	24	27	24	24	26

Table 6. Character accent for *English firsthand access, success, 1, 2,* and *Touchstone 1-4*

Accent	EF A	EF S	EF 1	EF 2	TS 1	TS 2	TS 3	TS 4
GAE	19	20	19	22	25	23	24	25
British	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Australian	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New Zealand	0	3	5	2	0	0	0	0
Latin American	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Chinese	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Japanese	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Korean	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Eastern European	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	24	24	24	24	27	24	24	26

is unacceptable, as exposure to only American (or British) English will be inadequate in preparing students to communicate with English speakers from OC and EC countries, as well as speakers from other IC countries. Accurate representation of English users and uses may be necessary to prepare Japanese university students for the variety of English speakers and accents they will encounter. These results lend support to Matsuda's (2003) conclusion that, "The understanding of different varieties is also a prerequisite for developing critical awareness of and resistance to linguistic imperialism and the power inequality that may exist in international communication" (p. 494).

Although both textbook series are diverse in their portrayal of men and women, the majority of conversations occurred between males and females, which is artificial and misleading. A wider variety of gender interactions, including more conversations featuring small groups, would be welcome. Otherwise, students may conclude that the majority of conversations occur between males and females or mistakenly believe English should be used with a member of the opposite sex.

Admittedly, the primary limitation of this study was in failing to obtain student perceptions of English users and uses as represented by the textbooks. Until this is accomplished, the limited representation of English users and uses within these textbook series cannot be directly correlated with student perceptions of English users and uses.

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Appendices

The appendices for this article can be downloaded from <jalt-publications.org/tlt/resources/2009/0901a.pdf>