Changes in Diversity and Inclusion in Textbook Images Over Time

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Images found in commercially published ELT coursebooks have been criticized for their lack of diversity and inclusion, specifically for their lack of gender balance (Cook 2005, 2015; Datzman, 2015) and for their lack of racial inclusion (Kim, 2012; Otlowski, 2003). Babaii and Ansary (2003) suggested that little changed in the 30 years from the 1970s to 2003. This study investigated the images in two general EFL coursebooks commonly used in Japan by comparing the ratio of gender balance and racial inclusion between the textbooks' two first editions from the 1980s and 1990s to their more recent fourth editions from 2012. Results show that the images in both coursebooks have become more gender balanced and more racially inclusive.

商業用に出版されているELT教科書に見られる画像は、多様性の無さと受容力の無さについて批判されている。中でも画像に示されている人物の性別の偏り（Cook 2005, 2015; Datzman, 2015）と民族の多様性に対する偏り（Kim, 2012; Otlowski, 2003）が指摘されている。BabaiiとAnsary（2003）は、1970年代から2003年の約30年でほぼ何も変化していないと指摘する。本研究では、日本で一般的に使用されている2種類のELT教科書の1980年代〜1990年代に出版された初版と2012年に出版された最新版である第四版に使用されている画像の性別バランスの割合と民族の多様性について調査した。調査の結果、最新版に使用されている画像は、より性別の割合のバランスが取れ、より民族の多様性があることが判明した。

Images have always been used in language education ranging from simple drawings scratched on a chalkboard by the teacher to the glossy photographs found in today's modern coursebooks. Most of the discussion about images in ELT relates to how they can be used for promoting communication and teaching language (e.g., Goldstein, 2008; Keddie, 2009). Whether images contribute to learning or are just decoration has been debated (e.g., Hill, 2003, 2013; Romney, 2012, 2017). But what do images communicate about diversity and inclusion?

Many teachers assume that publishers have addressed the issue of diversity and inclusion (Sleeter & Grant, 1991). In fact, many publishers have guidelines for illustrations that seek to mitigate bias issues and increase diversity and inclusion (Ravitch, 2004). Gray (2010) analyzed several guidelines and discovered that although illustrations and photographs are discussed, most focus on language elements such as avoiding sexist descriptions, masculine pronouns, and the use of honorific titles. Furthermore, he noted that these guidelines were initially suggestions, with many coursebooks falling short of the recommendations.

Several studies of ELT coursebooks have found clear deficiencies in the visual depictions of gender and race. Examining gender bias in ELT coursebook visuals, Cook (2005, 2015) found that men were more often depicted than women (56% to 43%) and that women were often used as decorative images with no connection to the text. Similar results were also found by Datzman (2015), but with a smaller gap of 52% for men and 48% for women. In a textbook for junior high school students in Japan, Otlowski (2003) discovered it had only four images out of "more than 100" showing an English teacher who "may not be 'white'" (p. 11). In images in Korean junior high school EFL textbooks where race could be determined, Kim (2012) found an overwhelming—near 100%—bias towards white teachers with only one Korean teacher shown in one book out of the three coursebooks investigated. The results of these studies demonstrate that visuals in ELT coursebooks are not particularly egalitarian in representations of gender and race, and in fact, many discriminate by omission.

One reason for the lack of diversity and inclusion in coursebook images may be because they are often just considered "backdrops to language tasks" (Pulverness & Tomlinson, 2013, p. 446). The language is more important than the visuals. It is not about who is speaking, but what is spoken. Diversity, inclusion, and ensuring people

are fairly and equally represented are secondary considerations, if considered at all. Image selection is usually a compromise between editors, designers, and authors (Bell & Gower, 2011) with pedagogical as well as diversity concerns not always being the most important. Many images are chosen for how striking they are, how well they fit the visual design/style of the textbook, or the cost for acquiring permission to use the images. Additionally, communication between authors and illustrators can be problematic (Prowse, 2011), and even though the author might have requested a diverse range of images, they may not always get them. Furthermore, the visual design of the book may be determined first and authors write to match a predecided design (Prowse, 2011).

Even though the language content of textbooks is paramount, images in language textbooks play an important role and should not be neglected. Even when not being used directly to teach language, images support learning in various ways by activating schema, conveying context (Romney, 2017), and transmitting culture. Bush (2007) argued, "As students see and use visuals that represent the day-to-day cultures where the target language is spoken, they can contemplate in their mind's eye the contexts in which the lives of the people take place" (p. 730). This is an important element of language learning as it allows learners to find commonalities, contrast differences, and imagine themselves as English speakers; therefore, images in ELT coursebooks should reflect an accurate and balanced depiction of English speakers and not just the Anglophone stereotype of being white and predominately male. Leaving out images of women or people of color is discrimination by omission, a form of oppression, and can be psychologically damaging (Taylor, 1994) to L2 learners. Could there be anything more demotivating to students then imagining that they cannot become fluent English speakers because images in their textbook don't depict their gender or race?

Is the Situation Improving?

After investigating how men and women are presented in both text and images in international EFL coursebooks used in Iran, Babaii and Ansary (2003) stated, "One may strongly claim that since the first study of sexism in ESL/EFL materials in the 70s, little has changed over the past three decades" (p. 5-6). However, in my experience using commercially available ELT coursebooks over the last 20 years much has changed. It is my impression that the images in textbooks are becoming more balanced and diverse. This was also echoed by several of the teachers interviewed by Gray (2010).

This study was undertaken to see if, in fact, images in ELT coursebooks have changed and to answer the following research question: Are the images in ELT coursebooks becoming more diverse and inclusive? To answer this question, and in order to compare changes over time, the fourth editions of two internationally successful coursebooks were compared to their first editions.

The Nomenclature of Racial and Gender Identity and This Study

A major difficulty in conducting any kind of research of this nature is that the nomenclature of identity regularly changes, is frequently based on personal preference, and is often politically motivated (American Psychology Association, 2010). Terms that are acceptable to one person are offensive to another. Furthermore, the underlying concepts behind the nomenclature are fraught with difficulty. The biological concept of race is "ill defined, poorly understood, and invalid" (Bhopal & Donaldson, 1998, p. 1304). Gender is a cultural and social construct and is not the same as biological sex (American Psychology Association, 2010). Any study seeking to look into these issues must begin by clarifying the terms used.

When discussing racial inclusion in this study, the terms *white* and *people of color* (POC) will be used. White is used as a term to indicate anyone not part of a specific racial or ethnic group (Bhopal & Donaldson, 1998) and stands in contrast to POC. It is recognized that many people are uncomfortable with these designations as a white identity is sometimes associated with white supremacy and POC is objectionable because its only commonality is that persons in this group are not white (Oliver, 2017). No value judgment is assigned here or intended.

Regarding the differentiation between male and female, the term *gender* will be used. It is recognized that gender refers to an "individual's psychological sense of being male or female" (Frable, 1997, p. 139), and that a psychological sense is not always physically manifested in outward appearance. Nevertheless, the study follows the tradition of gender representation in ELT materials research (see above) and uses a binary categorization. Again, no value judgment is assigned here or intended. It is also recognized that identity is a "personalized social construction" (Frable, 1997, p. 149). The line between white versus POC and male versus female is not the same for everyone. Care was taken to identify the people represented in the images under study to the best of the ability of the researcher and any misinterpretations are human error.

Methodology

The images in two popular internationally published four-skills, general-English coursebooks commonly used in Japan were reviewed to determine if the images in the textbooks have become more gender balanced and more racially inclusive across two

editions. The images from the first edition of *Headway Intermediate* (Soars & Soars, 1986, Oxford University Press), the fourth edition of *Headway Intermediate* (Soars & Soars, 2012), the first edition of *Interchange 2* (Richards, Hull, & Proctor, 1991, Cambridge University Press), and the fourth edition of *Interchange 2* (Richards, Hull, & Proctor, 2012) were compared. At the time that the data was collected, the fourth edition of *Headway Intermediate* was the most recent available. The fifth edition of *Interchange 2* (Richards, Hull, & Proctor, 2017) was available, but in an attempt to make the comparison between the series as similar as possible, only the fourth editions, coincidentally both published in 2012, were investigated.

All images were evaluated in the following ways: Only images clearly featuring people in the foreground were investigated. For example, a street scene might have two people in the foreground having a conversation and a large number of people in the background engaged in various activities. As the focus of the image is the people in the foreground, they were considered. The people in the background were regarded as part of the backdrop or setting and therefore were not counted. This was done because the people in the foreground and the text were usually connected but also because determining the race and gender of every person in the background was often impossible. Images without people or images with stylized people, such as stick figures, were not considered.

To determine gender balance, the gender of the people featured in the foreground were counted. In order to determine the inclusion of POC, the total number of images was calculated and images with a POC featured in the foreground were noted separately. This gave totals of both the number of people and the number of images featuring people.

The total numbers of women and men were calculated and compared to the overall total number of people and expressed as a percentage and ratio for each edition. The total number of images with a POC was calculated and compared to the overall total of images and also expressed as a percentage and ratio for each edition. The percentages and ratios of the first editions were then compared to the fourth editions to determine if diversity and inclusion have changed. As this study is concerned with the egalitarian representation of gender and race, a narrower ratio indicates a more balanced and diverse situation. A greater ratio indicates the opposite. The researcher makes no claim as to what an ideal number, percentage, or ratio of gender or POC should be and only uses number, percentage, and ratio as a means of comparing coursebook editions. Furthermore, as this study is only concerned with determining if the gender and racial representations in ELT coursebook images have become more egalitarian in a general sense, individual races as well as individual POC were not counted, only images featuring

POC were counted as opposed to images with only whites and the researcher makes no claim as to what races were represented or what an ideal representation should be.

Results and Discussion

In total 500 images clearly featuring people were investigated. These are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of Images Investigated

Headway (1986)	*Headway* (2012)	*Interchange* (1991)	*Interchange* (2012)	Total images
88	130	135	147	500

Balance of Men Versus Women

The initial edition of *Headway* had a large imbalance between genders: 72% (140 instances) of people shown were men. This changed significantly in the fourth edition with a closer count of 56% men to 44% women. Both editions of *Interchange* had more balanced representations of 54% men to 46% women in the first edition and 49% men to 51% women in the fourth edition. These results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of Men vs. Women Depicted in Images

Gender	*Headway* (1986)			*Headway* (2012)			*Interchange* (1991)			*Interchange* (2012)		
	Count	%	Ratio	Count	%	Ratio	Count	%	Ratio	Count	%	Ratio
Men	140	72%	2.5:1	114	56%	1.3:1	180	54%	1.2:1	121	49%	1:1
Women	55	28%		88	44%		155	46%		125	51%	

Note. All percentages and ratios are rounded.

The imbalance in the first edition of *Headway* appears quite extreme, but there are some possible mitigating circumstances. In the textbook, there were a number of images with large groups of men in the foreground, for example the image on page 15 shows an American football team (a sport not regularly played by women). A historical image on page 35 is of an army unit. The image on page 44 is of a men's marathon. These group

photos of men push the totals higher and may distort the overall balance. Nevertheless, most of the images in the text feature men. Unit 13, for example, has seven images of people and depicts three women and 15 men, with five of the seven images featuring men only.

Racial Inclusion

The first edition of *Headway* was the least inclusive with only four images (5%) out of 88 showing POC. The remaining 84 images (95%) featured only whites. This was somewhat improved in the fourth edition with 21% featuring POC and 79% showing only whites.

In the first edition of *Interchange* 38 images (28%) contained POC and 97 images (72%) had only whites. The situation in the fourth edition was reversed with a slight majority of the images featuring POC (51%) with 49% having only whites. These findings are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of Racial Inclusion in Images

Race	*Headway* (1986)			*Headway* (2012)			*Interchange* (1991)			*Interchange* (2012)		
	Count	%	Ratio	Count	%	Ratio	Count	%	Ratio	Count	%	Ratio
White	84	95%	21:1	103	79%	4:1	97	97%	2.6:1	72	49%	1:1
POC	4	5%		27	21%		38	38%		75	51%	

Note. All percentages and ratios are rounded.

Discussion

The fourth editions of both coursebooks showed improvement in both categories: They have better gender balance and racial inclusion. Although the fourth edition of *Interchange* has both slight numerical and percentage differences for each group, they round to a one-to-one ratio, essentially indicating that they are categorically balanced. This is a positive and progressive finding and is in line with the recommendations of groups like *Women in EFL Materials* and ELT publisher guidelines (Gray, 2010).

The lack of balance of gender and racial representation in the *Headway* coursebooks, especially the 1986 edition, could be because it was originally published before ELT publishers began using guidelines on representation. Gray (2010) noted that it wasn't until after the group *Women in EFL Materials* issued their guidelines in 1991 that publishers began to take diversity and inclusion seriously. The first author guideline

document that he looked at was issued in 1988, after the first edition of *Headway* was published.

Gray (2010) further noted that many of the early guideline documents were seen as suggestions and not prescriptions and that there was pushback from authors. This seems to be the case with Liz and John Soars, the authors of the *Headway* series. When responding to an article by Scott Thornbury (1999) on the issue of a lack of representation of homosexuals in their coursebooks on the now defunct TEFLFarm weblog, they said,

> There is definitely truth in what Mario says about political correctness from publishing houses—we fight it all the time—but sensitivity is also very important. Isn't everything always a question of balance—boring maybe but kind. However, if you think British publishers are coy, try working with the Americans. There, only an "apple-pie" world is allowed—no booze, no ciggies, no eccentric American characters—tell that to Scott Thornbury's crusade. They'd have to get out the smelling salts at any notion of gays. But funnily enough there has to be a % quota of coloured people per spread. (Soars & Soars, 2000, para. 7)

It is a strange quote that does not portray the authors in a very flattering light. On the one hand, they agree that sensitivity and balance are important, but at the same time they admit to fighting against it. They also seem to resent the fact that their publishers are requiring quotas. Is this a revelation of bias by the authors? Perhaps, but more likely it is just a lack of awareness about the seriousness of the issue; after all the *Headway* series is one of the best-selling ELT coursebooks of all time (Gray, 2010), and it is easy to see how both the authors and the publisher could minimize these issues. They weren't necessary for the initial success of the series.

One of the more controversial selling points of a global coursebook, as opposed to a textbook produced locally, is that they have examples of native English by native English speakers and as Kubota and Fujimoto (2013) noted, race—specifically being white—is often a proxy for native speaker. Gray (2010) discussed at length the notion that global coursebooks are commercial products that are quite sensitive to their marketability. If, as Kubota and Fujimoto suggested, students, teachers, and administrators equate native speakerism with being white and that native speaker models are seen as desirable, then perhaps a publisher would seek to have an imbalance favoring images of whites.

Finally, in the mid-1980s locating images was far more difficult than it is today. Now, finding images is a simple search through a stock photo agency's website. It could be the case that the textbook authors and designers wanted more diversity but were unable to find suitable images.

Limitations of the Study

This study only looked at four coursebooks and therefore is hardly generalizable to the entire field of ELT materials. It is possible that biases in early editions continue into later editions as publishers may be hesitant to change the successful formula too much. Another way to track the changes over time is to look at only the first editions of coursebooks and compare them by decade of publication, for example textbooks first published in the 1980s, the 1990s, the 2000s, and the 2010s. This may give a more accurate picture of the evolving nature of images used in ELT books.

Additionally, in this study, only a binary classification for racial inclusion of white versus POC was used. Obviously, the world is far more diverse and a more nuanced approach is warranted. However, because the focus of the study was on changes over time, and as a major criticism of ELT coursebooks has been that they are overwhelmingly native-English speaker focused, which is often equated with being white (Kubota & Fujimoto, 2013), the simple binary method was employed. The researcher was not so concerned with a headcount of POC, but instead if they were visible at all. It might be more revealing to use the same method for gender balance and count the actual numbers of POC compared to the number of whites.

Conclusion

Overall, the data collected on these coursebooks points to images in EFL textbooks becoming more gender balanced and more racially inclusive. However, there is still room for improvement. Although the results of this study indicate that the images are more balanced and more inclusive than before, an argument can be made that they are still not fully inclusive. The human experience and the diversity of human beings is more than gender and race. There are also issues of age, body size, disability, sexual orientation, and so on. As noted by Smiley et al. (2015), images in ELT coursebooks seem to suggest that English speakers are young, slender, not disabled, and heterosexual. Elderly people are only grandparents. Middle-aged people are only parents and bosses. Visual and hearing-impaired people don't exist and so on. The images in ELT coursebooks in fact have a long way to go before they are truly diverse and inclusive and truly represent the human race in all its forms.

Bio Data

Cameron Romney has taught ESL/EFL in both the United States and Japan for the last 21 years. He holds an MA in applied linguistics from the University of Colorado at Denver and a graduate certificate in instructional design from the University of Wisconsin Stout. His primary research interest is how the visual elements of language learning materials contribute to, or detract from, learning. In 2019, he was an assistant professor at Doshisha University in Kyoto, Japan.

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