Representations of Multiculturalism in Japanese Elementary EFL Textbooks: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

Recent reforms to Foreign Language Activities policies in Japan have highlighted the importance of facilitating multilingualism and multiculturalism in global contexts. However, many of the most recent elementary school textbooks (2018-2020) for Foreign Language Activities classes in Japan are English Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks focused largely on English language in tourism settings rather than in educational and social perspectives. With inspiration from critical discourse analysis (e.g., Fairclough 1992a; 1992b; 2001), this paper critically examines representations of multilingualism and multiculturalism in four Japanese EFL textbooks used in elementary schools, *We Can 1*, *We Can 2*, *Let's Try 1* and *Let's Try 2* (MEXT, 2018). Findings show that the videos, video activities, and images center Japanese culture, and that countries outside of Japan appear in over-simplified mediums, while minority cultures within Japan are not explicitly represented.

Keywords: Japan, EFL, textbook analysis, elementary school, multilingualism, multiculturalism, MEXT, intercultural communication, global thinking, critical analysis, foreign language activities

Introduction

In 2011, Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) officially introduced "外国語活動/ *gaikokugo katsudou*" (Foreign Language Activities) to all Japanese public elementary schools as a revision to the national curriculum. One of the anchoring objectives of this policy reform was, and in 2020 remains, to "…form the foundation of pupils' communication abilities through foreign languages while developing the understanding of languages and cultures…" (MEXT, 2010a, p. 1). In 2019, this aim was expounded upon in a publication by MEXT that detailed the necessity of foreign language education's role in nurturing "globally-minded individuals who excel in language, communication skills, subjectivity and understanding towards different cultures, from early stages of elementary schools…" (MEXT, 2019, p. 10). MEXT also sought to strengthen foreign

language education "including English," as well as to develop students' global ways of thinking concerning social problems (MEXT, 2019, p. 10). There is, thus, a clear orientation towards the development of multicultural understanding.

International organizations such as UNESCO emphasize the importance of educational curricula at all levels of schooling as a means of contributing to an intercultural and peaceful society (Deardorff, 2019). Naturally, textbooks are an important embodiment of policy aspirations which both enable and constrain teachers' efforts to develop multicultural understanding. Acknowledging the influential power of textbooks, MEXT cites them as "the main learning material …to advance children's learning" (2019, p. 10). With this in mind, this critical analysis examines two series of textbooks being used in elementary grades 3-6 classrooms around Japan, *Let's Try 1* and *2* (MEXT, 2018a; 2018b), and *We Can 1* and *2* (MEXT, 2018c; 2018d) and examines multicultural and multilingual representations in these materials. Ostensibly, these textbooks are being used to promote awareness of both multilingualism and multiculturalism because they have been developed to be representative of multiple languages and cultural groups that speak those languages (MEXT, 2018a; 2018b; 2018c; 2018d).

As these textbooks are created and distributed by a government ministry, representations of people and cultures contained within are necessarily linked to the politics of culture, identity, and citizenship (Dendrinos, 2015). Textbook depictions not only represent but can also help mitigate problematic power relations within society, and so a critical approach to analysis is useful for examining text content in social practices and power dynamics. This paper takes inspiration from critical discourse analysis (e.g., Fairclough 1992a; 1992b; 2001) by looking closely at the connection between textual and visual representations and the broader ideological landscape of language education within Japan. It examines textbook content in relation to MEXT's goals to facilitate multicultural understanding and global thinking.

Literature Review

Overview of policy landscape and ideologies in language education in Japan

Under the World Englishes Model (Kachru, 1985; 1992), Japan is designated as an "expanding circle country," wherein English is spoken as a foreign language (EFL) and is employed for international communication, including business and diplomacy. English does not have an official political status in Japan though it is a formal academic subject in junior high school (middle school), high school, and college and will be officiated as a formal subject in elementary school in April 2020 (Aoki, 2016).

English education in public schools has undergone several major policy reforms since its inception during the Meiji era (circa 1868), including English classes attempting to shift from a written literacy focus to a quadra-focused implementation of writing, reading, listening, and speaking skills. In response to a TOEFL survey (an English language examination) conducted in 1997-8 that ranked Japan and North Korea the lowest of all Asian countries for English proficiency, Japan implemented a five-year proposal (2003-8) that was heavily focused on communication in the English language (Kaiser, 2003). This national curriculum was revised again in 2008, formally introducing foreign language education into elementary schools. And, as noted, in 2011, "Foreign Language Activities" class became mandatory in public elementary schools, with the primary objective of encouraging multilingualism and multiculturalism by developing students' understandings of multiple languages and cultures (Horii, 2015; MEXT, 2010a). Since 2018, policies have continued to undergo changes in preparation for the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics, such as the inclusion of Olympics vocabulary in foreign language education textbooks (e.g., *Let's Try* and *We Can*). And most recently, MEXT expanded their focus on multilingualism and multiculturalism to be inclusive of global mindsets, social problems, and

communication (MEXT, 2019).

Despite MEXT's goals for students to learn multiple foreign languages (MEXT, 2010a; 2011a; 2011b; 2018f; 2019) English has been centered as the primary foreign language to be learned (Liddicoat, 2013; MEXT, 2019). This appears to conflict with the goal of developing communication through "foreign languages," plural. Horii (2015), too, questions how MEXT's focus on English acquisition, and no other foreign languages, can facilitate multilingualism. Although these education policies aver the importance of multicultural and intercultural perspectives in a globalizing world, they simultaneously elevate English as the primary foreign language to be learned (MEXT, 2014; 2019). For example, MEXT noted that it "is endeavoring to strengthen foreign language education, including English…" (2019, p. 10)

The selection of English as "the" foreign language is intertwined with several ideologies. Foremost, English is framed as the *lingua franca* of the world, making it a useful selection for language learning. However, deeply rooted ideologies that associate English with technology and civilization are also ubiquitously rooted in global education (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009; Shin & Kubota, 2010). These assumptions are in large part due to English's imposition by various forces during British colonization (Soto-Molina & Méndez, 2020). Second, researchers have argued that framings of English education in Japan link with larger ideological goals of promoting Japanese viewpoints in international contexts and expressing an essentialized Japanese identity rather than promoting genuine intercultural dialogue (Liddicoat, 2013). Despite the discourse of 国際理解 (*kokusairikai*, "international understanding") which is prevalent in Japanese language-in-education policy documents (MEXT, 2008a), critics have suggested that language education has been co-opted to emphasize a distinctive Japanese national and cultural identity, while reinforcing the perception of inherent differences between Japan and the outside world (Kubota, 2019). Such perceptions are often sustained by the ideology of Japanese uniqueness known as 日本人論 (*Nihonjinron*, "the question of the Japanese people") (Liddicoat, 2013). Thus, the emphasis on the English language as the premier choice of foreign language goes hand in hand with the pursuit of larger ideological goals.

Japanese English textbooks

Textbooks are institutionally sanctioned tools in formal education. As such, learners are likely to understand textbooks as markers of truth (Weninger & Kiss, 2015). Textbooks are particularly influential in Japan, where they are approved by the national government (MEXT) and are featured as the center of public-school lessons, with classes tending to be constructed around them (Saito, 1995). In some instances, they may also be students' first sources of multicultural input. There is a need therefore to analyze the language in textbooks for the realities that they represent. Researchers have analyzed Japanese EFL textbooks for both content and cultural implications (Davidson & Liu, 2018; Horii, 2015; Matsuda, 2002). Horii's (2015) critical analysis of discursive practices in Japan's language policies and textbooks drew from Fairclough's (1992a; 1992b; 2001) CDA model to analyze a Japanese EFL textbook, *Eigo Nooto*. Horii found that focusing exclusively on English (with Japanese instructions) may perpetuate the ideology of Japanese-English bilingualism as the ideal *multilingualism*. The implications of this approach exclude minority groups in Japan by centering Japanese and English as the ideal and thus excluding or discrediting non-Japanese students' first or second languages.

Another series of textbooks, *Hi, Friends!* (MEXT, 2012a; 2012b), was also cited by researchers as lacking cultural depth (Davidson & Liu, 2018). Student engagement with the texts was found to be limited to "spectating," (Davidson & Liu, 2018, p. 12). In other words, there were no meaningful discussions or activities based on the images in the books, consequently reducing content that would

encourage students to reflect on international relationships. Their study also found, through a qualitative analysis (a series of interviews), that students hesitated to identify as ''global citizens'' even after working with the textbooks.

Japanese EFL textbooks may have a role in promoting these narrow social viewpoints. For example, Matsuda (2002) found that English textbooks for junior high schools emphasized inner circle countries (countries where English is the dominate language of government and education [Kachru, 1985; 1992]). In these books, English speakers from these countries were seen as the predominate users of English, an approach that could deter students from learning English or understanding speakers of other Englishes. Likewise, Song (2013) envisages that long-term use of textbooks like these, which activate only superficial understandings of cultures, may lead to biases in students' perspectives. This lack of cultural understanding is dangerous in the long-term, as imbalanced cultural representations can lead to the perpetuation of stereotypes (Davidson & Liu, 2018). Still, language textbooks and supplementary materials are uniquely poised to encourage multiculturalism/multilingualism as they have the ability to offer varied activities, deep discussions, engaging materials, and multimodal exposure to other cultures and languages.

The analysis of textbooks is especially relevant in our globalizing world as on-going textbook analyses have ''…uncovered the ideological presuppositions behind the choice of cultural topics and the ways these ideologies are reinforced through grammatical and lexical exercises'' (Kramsh & Vinall, 2015, p. 13). One way that researchers have revealed ideologies, power dynamics, and other social contexts in textbooks is through the employment of Fairclough's (1992a; 1992b; 2001) aforementioned CDA model (Ahmad & Shah, 2019; Arabmofrad & Esmaeili, 2015; Gonzalez, 2011) or through critical analyses informed by CDA (Horii, 2015). Although the field of CDA has not received widespread attention in Japan, Tsukioka (2005) found CDA to be an indispensable element for improving English reading and writing in Japanese university classes (as students were taught to read critically for social discourses and as classes focused on discussions on these topics), and Yanagida (2013) argues that a lack of critical engagement with texts can be ameliorated through the use of critical discourse studies (cited in Ota, 2019). As elementary school students are becoming aware of larger social contexts beyond their own through multicultural content in textbooks, it is important to consider how representations of cultures and languages appear in their materials.

Methodology

This study takes a critical approach to examine representations of multilingualism and multiculturalism within linguistic, visual, and cultural representations in the textbooks, inspired by critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992a; 1992b; 2001). The study sought to answer the question below.

    Q) How do *Let's Try* (*1 & 2*) and *We Can* (*1 & 2*) reflect multilingualism and multiculturalism for global thinking?

CDA consists of three interrelated processes of analysis: considering the object of analysis, considering the process of how the object is received by human subjects, and considering socio-historical conditions the object is situated in (Janks, 1997). In order to generate a clear descriptive base for deeper analysis, quantitative data (a count of cultural references) was first gathered by coding the texts' content according to cultural representations, and then qualitative data (textual and visual analyses) was obtained through a process of coding and thematic analysis (Creswell, 2015). Thus, for this study, text analysis, interpretation, and social analysis are employed. CDA is particularly useful when approaching textbooks, as it allows the analyst to focus on both the text and the socio-historic/political/cultural contexts of the text, as well as the expected learning outcomes of the

governing bodies that have implemented them.

Coding & content analysis of textbooks & materials

The data for this study was derived from four textbooks, *Let's Try 1, Let's Try 2* (MEXT, 2018ab), *We Can 1,* and *We Can 2* (MEXT, 2018c; 2018d), the textbooks' respective companion computer modules (of the same names), and the teacher manuals for each textbook (MEXT, 2018efgh). These materials are currently being used in elementary schools across Japan for Foreign Language Activities classes in grades 3-6, respectively. A majority of textbook usage in class comes from the computer modules that include 270 videos between the four textbooks, designed for comprehensible input. This study examines the 270 "Watch and Think" videos in the computer modules, the textbook images, textbook content, and teacher manuals for multicultural content. It does not examine the supplementary materials (such as cards, songs, or listening activities), *Hi, Friends! 1* (MEXT, 2012a), which is a text that appears in the back of the textbook *We Can 1,* or *Hi, Friends! 2* (MEXT, 2012b), also a text that appears in the back of *We Can 2[i]*.

In addition to these sources, texts and documents related to Foreign Language Activities from MEXT that were publicly available were gathered in both English and Japanese when possible. To ensure validity in coding and analyses, the Japanese teaching manuals and MEXT policies were discussed with two independent translators.

Drawing on Fairclough's CDA model, I first analyzed textbook products. A qualitative content analysis of the texts and videos included coding, identifying patterns and themes, and drawing conclusions (Yin, 2016). Based on the findings from this content analysis, I selected excerpts and images from the textbook and selections of videos from the computer programs to critically review. These selections fell under one or more of the following categories devised from identified themes: *1. The content / imagery generalizes groups of people; 2. The language, content, and/or images promote Japan without promoting multilingualism or multiculturalism; 3. The images appear generalized or white-washed;* and *4. Substantial attempts at multilingualism and multiculturalism are not facilitated by activities or teacher manual suggestions.*

Second, I considered how the materials could be perceived by human subjects. An independent coder was trained, and our findings were compared to account for discrepancies. With recognition of how text, imagery, and culture interact, van Leeuwen's and Kress's (cited in van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2013) semiotic approach to the examination of visual images was considered. Specifically, images were considered cross-culturally, representationally, and as narrative structures, in keeping with van Leeuwen and Kresse's model.

Reviewing the textbooks' imagery required codifying over 1,000 images in the four texts as well as the 270 videos. In addition to myself, one of this study's translators, and this study's independent coder (of different ethnicities, countries, and first languages) both surveyed the images in the texts and offered (different) interpretations of the illustrations. This triangulation allowed for multiple perspectives of the illustrations to be recorded.

Findings

Content analysis found that, in terms of (multi)cultural content, the textbooks (MEXT, 2018abcd) primarily portray Japanese culture and rely on cursory, superficial inclusion of other cultures to introduce students to the world. These inclusions are framed as Japanese tourist reference points, rather than as immersive cultural expressions. Though examining the nature of social powers and ideologies present, a presupposition of CDA (Maposa, 2015), emerging themes in this study show that Japanese

linguistic and cultural ideologies (in keeping with elements of *Nihonjinron*) are present in the texts, and that images are lacking in authentic representation. While the textbooks include representations of multiple cultures and languages, Japanese cultural perceptions emphasizing Japan's distinctiveness while generalizing "foreign" countries are projected. The teaching manuals do not include class discussion points, storybooks, or group activities necessary to facilitate truly multicultural/lingual approaches to language education.

Verbal / textual representations of languages and cultures

Although none of the textbooks are focused on multiculturalism or multilingualism exclusively, a range of languages are present in *Let's Try 1 & Let's Try 2* and *We Can 1 & We Can 2* (MEXT, 2018a; 2018b; 2018c; 2018d). Table 1 shows the number of languages represented in each of the four texts.

Table 1 *Languages represented in the textbooks*

Textbook	Number of languages represented	Languages represented (not including proper nouns or food names):
Let's Try 1 (3rd grade)	9	Chinese, English, Finnish, German, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Swahili
Let's Try 2 (4th grade)	9	Arabic, English, Hindi, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, Swahili
We Can 1 (5th grade)	3	English, French, Japanese
We Can 2 (6th grade)	5	Arabic, English, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian

Outside of English and Japanese, most of these languages appear only once. For example, in *We Can 1*, the word "bonjour" is spoken in a video once. In *Let's Try 1*, a speaker in a video counts from 1-10 in Spanish, once. Collectively, the only words spoken in Finnish, Swahili, Portuguese, Russian, Indonesian, and German are the respective greetings for "hello," and the only words spoken in Korean, Chinese, Hindi, and Arabic are the respective greetings "hello" and the numbers 1-10. Students are not prompted to learn these greetings or numbers, though. Rather, they are asked to listen to the speakers in the videos and guess which language is being spoken. This raises the question as to whether sporadic inclusions are intended to provide "the foundation of pupils' communication abilities through foreign languages" (MEXT, 2010a, p. 1) or "communication skills in foreign languages" (MEXT, 2019, p. 10). As this is the first formal exposure that many Japanese students have to languages outside of Japanese or English, students are unlikely to able to hypothesize which language is spoken in which country based on linguistic patterning. Additionally, according to the teacher's manual for *Let's Try 2,* "The first unit is created with the desire to educate a child to speak not only English but other various languages in the world," (MEXT, 2018f, p. 5 [translation]). From this scant inclusion of additional languages, it is not probable that students will develop multilingual communicative competence. Instead, this type of shallow exotification "may result in a superficial, possibly harmful multilingualism" (Horii, 2015, p. 152). These activities have the potential to encourage the presupposition that people of other countries all look and speak in a certain way. The idealized homogeny of Japan by macro-structured ideologies may contribute to this (McVeigh, 2014).

Of all of the languages that appear in the textbooks, only English and Japanese are represented consistently *throughout* the texts, with English being the vastly dominate language of listening activities, video dialogues, songs, and vocabulary. The video dialogues function almost exclusively in English, with only 12 out of 270 videos taking place entirely in a language other than English. However, MEXT currently seeks to educate students to understand multiple languages, inclusive of English (MEXT, 2014; 2019). When speakers of other languages are included in videos, they are represented in the accompanying textbook activities by a flag and a character illustration (excluding presumed

Japanese characters[ii], who frequently appear throughout the text without a Japanese flag). In activities like those mentioned above, students are asked to interact with the text by drawing a line from the character's illustration (representative of the child actors in the videos), to a national flag illustration. Horii (2015) points out that these activities promote generalizations about the languages spoken around the world by "perpetuate[ing] the existing linguistic and cultural hierarchy by stereotypically nominating only one dominate language and culture from each country" (p. 153). The present elementary textbooks function as *introductions* to multiple countries, and so the inclusion of flag imagery and general markers of language may be justified, but to Horii's point, this assumption excludes minority and indigenous languages present in every country. As will be discussed, it is notable that no representations of minority or Indigenous groups within Japan appear in the texts.

The linguistic modes of the text must also be examined. In the *We Can* texts (significantly longer than the *Let's Try* books, and used biweekly in grades 5 and 6), sentences like the following are designed to allow students to gain cultural input and are poised as non-pejorative explorations of textbook characters' lives:

Table 2 *Examples of language in the texts and videos*

Text	Page	Text / Dialogue
We Can 1	43	I want to go to France…I want to eat a croissant. I want to buy some chocolate.
	44	I want to go to Egypt…You can ride camels. I want to eat moussaka. I want to see the Pyramids.
We Can 2	60	I'm from the Philippines. I want to be a fruit shop owner. Our bananas are so delicious.
		I live in France. I want to be an artist. I love pictures. I am good at drawing pictures. My father is an artist.
	12	Hello. Welcome to India. I'm Laksh. Nice to meet you. We have curry and nan in India. You can eat spicy curry and nan. It's delicious! Why don't you try it?

Some interpretations of these sentences may find them to be over-simplifying or stereotypical of the characters' home countries. Textbook depictions of culture are often over-simplified and thus problematic (Davidson, 2019; Moss, Barletta, & Charmorro, 2015; Yuen, 2011). It may be possible to challenge these stereotypes and deepen understanding of multiculturalism with class discussions and with teachers' guidance. Unfortunately, through interviews with students and teachers, Davidson and Liu (2018) found that these discussions rarely occur.

Positive associations with multiculturalism can be observed through the use of adjectives in the texts:

Table 3 *Sample of adjectives with positive connotations in holidays in texts and materials*

We Can 2	Pg. 12	1.) Hello. Welcome to Brazil. I'm Sophia Nice to see you again. Every year we have a carnival in Rio de Janerio in Brazil. You can enjoy dancing. You can see beautiful costumes too! It's exciting.
We Can 1	Pg. 10-11	1.) In Thailand, the 'Songkran Festival' is from April 13th to 15th. It's a water festival. People splash water on each other on the streets. Many tourists come to the festival and have fun with Thai people. 2.) People in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil have a big carnival in February. They parade along the main street dancing in colorful costumes. 3.) In Peru the 'Inti Rami Festival' is on June 24th. It's a big festival in South America. People from all over the world come to Cusco and enjoy the festival.

Adjectives such as *beautiful, healthy, colorful*, and *wonderful,* and verbs and verbal phrases including *enjoy, have fun, parade*, and *dancing*, contribute to positive associations with cultures outside of Japan. In Table 4's (below) Sample of Holiday Descriptions, there are explanations of holidays throughout the world in an activity in *We Can 1*. The videos for this activity describe, for example, that New Year's is celebrated on January 1st in Japan. It also, for example, talks about how Christmas is celebrated on December 25th in Australia. However, it fails to acknowledge that other countries also celebrate New Year's on January 1st and makes no mention of people living in Japan who celebrate Christmas or other holidays. There is no mention of potential cultural overlap. The failure to acknowledge holidays as occurring globally further contributes to easy-to-categorize stereotypes and oversimplifications. These instances also highlight how multicultural representations in the texts focus on cultures outside of Japan, rather than on diversity within Japan.

Table 4 *Sample of holiday descriptions in We Can 1*

1. *We Can 1* p.10	We celebrate New Year on January 1st in Japan. Many people go to Shinto shrines or temples to make a new year wish. We also eat special food and rice cakes. Children play card games like *karuta* or *hyakunin-isshu*.
2. *We Can 1* P. 10	People in Rio de Janerio in Brazil have a big carnival in February. They parade along the main street dancing in colorful costumes.
2. *We Can 1* P. 10	Christmas is December 25th. In Australia, it's hot and it's summer. During Christmas many people go to the beach. You can see Santa Claus at the beach.

Furthermore, Table 4 highlights the discrepancies in the descriptions of cultural holidays in the textbooks. First, the passage marked ''2'' begs the question of *what* people are celebrating in Rio de Janeiro (or in the other countries in this activity). The textbook offers no guided discussions or materials for teachers to help students take the next step in understanding the various holidays outside of Japan featured in this activity, thus stopping short of helping students to understand ''languages and cultures.''

In contrast to this, a trend of detailed inclusions of Japanese culture occurs across the texts, primarily in *We Can 1* and *2*. For example, in *We Can 2,* four characters, Muhammad, Sophia, John, and Laksh, appear in text and video modules for a listening activity. In the videos, the human actors talk individually and briefly to the viewer about the food in their respective countries[iii]. On the next page, three Japanese children, Kenta, Saki, and Aoi, talk individually about Japanese food. Evidenced in Table 5, descriptions of Japanese food occur with more positive adjectives, adverbs (''very'') and verbal phrases (''I like ~ very much'') than those attributed to other countries' foods.

While Muhammad says that he likes milukhiyah soup very much, the verbal phrase ''I like [a country] very much'' is used exclusively to express love of Japan (and occurs several times throughout the videos and listening activities). This sentence is not used to denote love of any other countries in the texts. It is, however, used to reference Japan across the texts that are meant to highlight *other* countries, such as when, in a video about India, the narrator mentions liking Japanese anime ''very much,'' (MEXT, 2018c, p. 21). Considering social and text mergence through CDA (Maposa, 2015), the emphasis here seems to be on the acquisition of language that will ''…allow Japanese people to express Japanese ideas and the Japanese worldview to non-Japanese people'' (Liddicoat, 2013, p. 208). This recurring inclusion problematizes goals for true intercultural communication by highlighting ideological constructions of a national identity (Liddicoat, 2013). Understanding one's self contributes to communication (Inozu & Sahinkarakas, 2017) and learning to talk about one's own experiences is a critical part of second language acquisition. However, as the textbooks are presented as materials for

multiculturalism, a more globalized model of identity-construction would be to encourage students to learn about themselves through learning about others in international perspectives, as well as through the perspectives of minority voices within their own culture.

Table 5 *Sample of food descriptions in We Can 2* (italics and bold font added)

We Can 2 p.12	1.	Hello, welcome to India. I'm Laksh, nice to meet you. We have curry and nan in India. You can eat *spicy* curry and nan. It's *delicious*. Why don't you try it?
	2.	Hello, welcome to Australia. I'm John. Nice to meet you. We have Christmas in summer in Australia. We spend the time with our families. We usually have barbeque at home.
	3.	Hello, welcome to Egypt. My name is Muhammad. Nice to see you again. We have a *wonderful* soup in Egypt. It's milukhiyah soup. It's *very healthy*. I like it very much.
We Can 2. p.13	1.	Hello I'm Kenta. I like Japan *very much*. We have *delicious* food in Japan. I like tempura *very much*. Try and make it. It's *very tasty*.
	2.	Hello I'm Aoi. *I like Japan very much*. We have *delicious* food in Japan. I like miso soup *very much*. I eat miso soup every morning. It's *very healthy*. Can you make it?
	3.	Hello, I'm Saki. I like Japan *very much*. We have *delicious* food in Japan. I like sushi *very much*. You can *enjoy* it at a sushi restaurant. You can make it at home too. It's *delicious*.

Engendering global thinking necessitates recognizing other cultures as legitimate and developing the ability to conceptualize the validity of other cultures outside of one's own. However, these textbooks situate language learning through a tourism-based lens— a way of observing the "other" from the perspective of a tourist or viewing others as tourists (Vinall & Shin, 2018). For example, in *We Can 1*, several videos in the beginning of the textbook show Japanese citizens in positions of power (a station attendant, a tour guide, a taxi driver), assisting presumably lost "foreigners," by speaking to them in English (MEXT, 2018c, p. 3). In another set of videos, a Japanese actress portrays a tour guide working in a tourism office and encourages viewers to visit Australia, Italy, Peru, and France, listing foods that they can eat and goods they can buy (p. 41). In *We Can 2*, four an activity describes the cultural events one can do throughout Japan's four seasons (ending with the phrase "I like Japan very much") (p. 16). Through learning about holidays around the world (as well as other general topics that comprise most of the textbooks' contents, such as colors, foods, sports, and formulaic expressions), the ideal of making global friends is envisaged. However, because cultural information in the texts is shared as sets of facts ("We have~," "It's good," "You can try~," etc.), rather than as identity through personal stories, a cosmopolitan image is cultivated (Vinall & Shin, 2013). This further disseminates an assumption that culture is homogeneous, leading to a separation between students and cultures. In other words, while food and travel are certainly parts of culture, the tourist approach demonstrates that "other countries" in the texts exist merely as temporary locations designed for travel.

These videos may be effective in garnering interest in places outside of Japan, but there is room for growth in the facilitation of multiculturalism and global thinking here. For example, the limitations of this tourist gaze can be mitigated, even in elementary school books, through meaningful activities, such as those proposed by Vinall and Shin (2018), which facilitate the exploration of friendship and cultural differences, or Story Circles proposed by Deardorff (2019). Multicultural awareness and appreciation can also be facilitated for young learners, as evidenced through lessons for preschoolers utilized by Klefstad and Martinez (2013). Some may question implementing reflective and multicultural activities for elementary school students. However, evidence supports the notion that young learners are in fact capable of this depth of thinking and would benefit from building awareness of their positionalities and cultures, as well as those of others (Cothern, 1991; Davidson, 2019;

Deardorff, 2019; Klefstad & Martinez, 2013;Teaching Tolerance, 2017).

Another way to minimize this tourist lens for the facilitation of meaningful global thinking is through authentic interactions. A strength of *We Can & Let's Try* are videos that show people of different ethnicities interacting positively with one another. Children of different (presumed) ethnicities speak together in 11.1% (*Let's Try 1*), 29.6% (*Let's Try 2*), 10% (*We Can 1*), and 17.5% (*We Can 2*) of the videos, respectively. Such basic acts of human interaction cannot be understated. While these videos *show* interaction among peers of different ethnicities, there are few activities in the texts or videos that involve learner-learner interaction. In activities that encourage output, students are prompted by isolated scripts such as, "What food do you like?," "What do you want?," "Where are you from?" when communicating with each other, but there are no extended conversational exchanges meant to be achieved. Thus, students move on to the next question quickly and unnaturally, practicing a pattern rather than moving into conversation. This type of interaction "… may not boost students' engagement or investment in the use of language, thus missing the opportunity to perceive it as a social practice through which they can construct their identity and express opinions" (Moss *et al*., p. 80). Given students' linguistic knowledge of English in grades 3-6, it is not likely to assume that students will be able to carry on lengthy or abstract conversations in English, though it is possible to facilitate more authentic and meaningful conversations with limited language abilities.[iv]

In addition to isolated language practice, many of the tasks and video dialogues are overly simplistic, with exaggerated pronunciation and syntax, possibly in order to provide comprehensible input for students. This type of forced language use has been argued as undesirable, especially since ultimately, the teacher often ends up translating for the students. Dendrinos (2015) notes this kind of language "…does not assist the development of multilingual or plurilingual competence" (p. 39). In order to truly develop multilingualism, translanguaging classroom practices (using multiple languages strategically as integrated communication) may be the most impactful way to use language (Dendrinos, 2015). This mirrors Vinall and Shin's (2018) activity for cultural understanding and friendship.

It should be noted that while many specific activities to facilitate multicultural education exist, the teaching manuals do not offer concrete suggestions for global teaching, but rather, make broad and abstract suggestions, such as: "It is recommended to think about the differences and similarities between Japan and the uniqueness of other countries" (MEXT, 2018a, p. 65 [translation]); "…talk about the differences between the activities in the country shown and those of Japan" (MEXT, 2018c, p. 36 [translation]); and, "We would like children to nurture the foundation where they can experience diversity…" (MEXT, 2018b [translation]). These generalized ideals of internationalism do not address specific approaches to education and may be difficult for teachers to build on, especially considering the anxiety of many elementary school teachers who, as of 2018, teach English, often without any professional development or training (Machida, 2015).

The linguistic representations found in these textbooks provide mostly shallow examples of other foreign languages and cultures and are not inclusive of minority or indigenous groups in Japan. The lack of meaningful discussions in teacher manuals and texts does not prepare students to use any additional languages to "excel in language, communication skills, subjectivity [or] understanding towards different cultures" (MEXT, 2019) or to develop their own understandings of their cultures. Rather, a tourist-centric gaze perpetuates cultural hegemony. These findings point to the need for more authentic and personal representations of multiculturalism.

Visual representations

Analysis of visual representations identified a number of patterns, including a distinct lack of visual

representations of discernable Black people or people of Color, as well as general trend of presenting characters as racially ambiguous. This latter trend can be easily observed in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 *We Can 2* (MEXT, 2018d, p. 12)

Figure 1 represents a microcosm of each text's contents, wherein most characters are illustrated with light skin, with a small minority of characters being depicted in a shade slightly tanner than ''very light.'' In the above textbook illustrations, Laksh is intended to represent an ethically Indian child, and Muhammad is meant to represent an Egyptian child. When compared to their accompanying child-actors in the videos though, the eponymous illustrations are clearly, significantly muted:

Figure 2 *Laksh and Saki. We Can 1 (MEXT, 2018c)*

Figure 3 *Muhammad. We Can 2* (MEXT, 2018d)[v]

Although the illustrations shown in the textbooks above may be intended to be representative of Black children or Children of Color (as evidenced here by the child actors in the videos), the illustrations are nearly indiscernible from shades of white. Drawing on CDA's concern with visuals and text in social understanding and analysis (Peräkylä, 2005; Wang, 2014), it is notable that discrimination and biases based on phenotypical traits are extant in Japan (Aiyar, 2017; Arudou, 2015; *BBC*, 2019; Cornyetz, 1994; Fitzpatrick & McFarlan, 2015; Hatano, 2019; McNeil, 2018; Mori, 2018). One causal point Mori (2018) drew to account for this bias is Japanese media's portrayal of white people, who, according to Mori, are almost always portrayed positively. As children as young as three can develop racial biases (Winkler, 2009), it is critical that early education materials take the steps to promote multicultural understanding and equality. This is in line with MEXT's aims to "nurture globally-minded individuals who excel in language, communication skills, subjectivity and understanding towards different cultures" (2019, p. 10). In light of this, this study's inclusion of an examination of the textbook images is important to understanding representation.

As a note, this study does not attempt to suggest racial or ethnic identities of the real children actors present in the videos, nor does it attempt to "assign" or presuppose intended ethnicities of illustrations in the textbooks. However, in order to estimate the discrepancies of visual representation in the texts, one of the aforementioned translators, this study's independent coder, and I each calculated the number of illustrations in the texts that we felt were contextually representative of different skin tones. This independent count was conducted with the knowledge that different viewers will have different perspectives and innate biases when viewing an image (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2010). We found that in each textbook, a significant majority of the images were perceived as being predominantly representative of light-skinned (not discernibly Black or of Color) figures. For example, in *We Can 2*, interpretations of light-skinned illustrations ranged from 488-530 illustrations, while interpretations of dark-skinned illustrations ranged from 19-26[vi]. Despite the subjectivity of these counts, discrepancies in representation are notable. And though skin color is not a valid indicator of ethnicity or identity, it is still of sociological significance as racial discrimination is pervasive worldwide.

It might be argued that artists strove for racial ambiguity in the illustrations. For example, consider the cover of *Let's Try 1*:
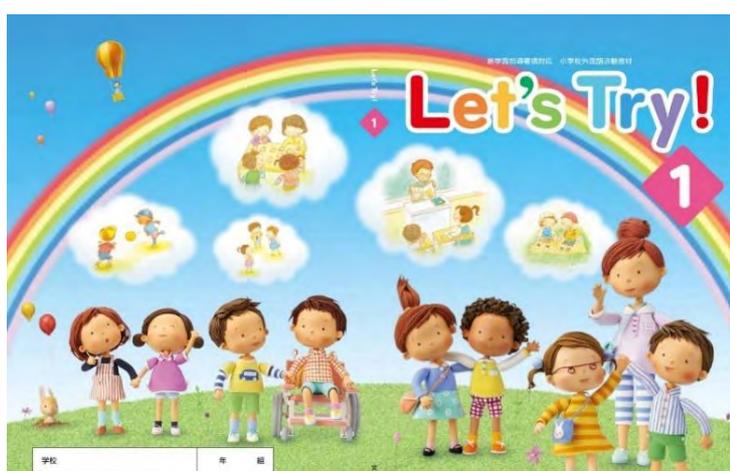
Figure 4 *Let's Try 1*. Cover

Racial ambiguity may be attempted by illustrators as a method of "inclusion." However, *not* associating characters with specific cultures or depicting examples of diversity in our world can give the impression that these "international" characters exist in a vacuum— a place that offers no ways for

students to construct knowledge about society (Moss *et al.*, 2015). This is also true of ambiguous backgrounds and dress, as seen on the covers of these textbooks and throughout (Moss *et al.*, 2015). It is important that textbook images include realistic representations of people and places as "visual language is not transparent and not universally understood; it is culturally specific" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 4).

Representation can affect young learners in a number of ways. For example, children are impacted by the "visibility" or "invisibility" of certain kinds of people and cultures (NAEYC.org). Seeing one's self represented in society and materials is important for learners, just as seeing normalized (i.e., not exotified) images of others is critical. By preschool, children have already developed ideas regarding human diversity, including discomfort or fear (NAEYC.org). Denying cultural differences through text or images ignores human beings' identities, an effect that can subsequently produce misguided or imbalanced understandings of others. Bhugra and Becker (2005) warn of the greater threats from aggregating these messages, including alienation, ethnocide, and even genocide. The lack of representation in images in the textbooks compounds the effects of inauthentic multiculturalism.

Representations of countries through cultural content

In *Let's Try* and *We Can*, the greatest number of specific cultural products, places, practices, and people across the texts are Japanese. This study's catalog of all cultural representations across the four books' videos and imagery borrows from Yuen's (2011) categorization of products, practices, persons, and perspectives. Here, a quantitative analysis of cultural representations includes cultural products (including places), practices, people, and social discourses (the last category differs from Yuen's). In this count, "products" refers to mentions of cultural events, holidays, cities, or locations and "cultural practices" references sociopragmatic descriptions of cultural greetings and other cultural forms such as bowing or siestas. As social discourses pertain specifically to culture, it is important that elementary classes reflect salient discussions on culture and ways of living (Teaching Tolerance, 2017), which justifies the inclusion of discourses as a category in this count. Textbooks themselves are social and cultural practices (Kramsch & Vinall, 2015). MEXT (2019) recognizes their importance and through textbooks, hopes to "…encourage students to have global ways of thinking with interest and deep knowledge concerning social problems, communication skills, and the ability to solve problems" (p. 10). However, as Table 6 shows, there are no specific mentions of social discussions outside of simplified references to places and holidays.

The total count of references across all cultures in the textbooks is, by this study's count, 164. The occurrence of Japanese cultural artifacts, practices, people, or social discourses is 42.1%, while the average, per country, of the remaining 27 countries' is 2.1%.

These findings echo those of Davidson and Liu (2018), who found a substantial imbalance between Japanese and non-Japanese cultural representation, with Japanese culture appearing significantly more than other cultures in *Hi, Friends!*. As an absence of cultural complexity and depth can negatively impact intercultural learning (Risager, 2018), the texts would benefit from more *meaningful* inclusions of multiculturalism/ multilingualism. For example, the four present textbooks contain no heroes or figures from countries outside of Japan. International figures could be added to the opening unit of *We Can 1*, which features four listening activities on famous Japanese figures. Or, for example, when *Let's Try 2* focuses on school schedules, a supplementary picture book on Malala Yousafzai's contributions to girls' education could be read and discussed. Through the inclusion of global figures, social discourses on the world can be broached to encourage global thinking. This inclusion can simultaneously help students make connections to their own lives to make language learning meaningful, while still being exposed to multiple cultures. De-centering Japanese perspectives in the

texts would allow for greater global representation.

Table 6 *Textual analysis of cultural references across four texts (not including visual imagery, listening activities, or songs)*

Country	Instances of cultural products / places	Instances of cultural practices	Instances of social discourses or discussions mentioned	Instances of famous people mentioned	Total (rounded to the nearest 1/10 of a percent)
America	11	4	0	0	15 (9.1%)
Australia	3	1	0	0	4 (2.4%)
Belgium	0	1	0	0	1 (.6%)
Brazil	7	1	0	0	8 (4.9%)
Canada	5	0	0	0	5 (3%)
China	1	1	0	0	2 (1.2%)
Egypt	6	0	0	0	6 (3.7%)
England	2	0	0	0	2 (1.2%)
France	4	1	0	0	5 (3%)
Finland	0	3	0	0	3 (1.8%)
Germany	3	0	0	0	3 (1.8%)
Hawaii (U.S.)	1	1	0	0	2 (1.2%)
India	4	1	0	0	5 (3%)
Indonesia	0	1	0		1 (.6%)
Italy	3	0	0	0	3 (1.8%)
Japan	47	14	0	8	69 (42.1%)
Kenya	0	1	0	0	1 (.6%)
Korea (S).	2	3	0	0	3 (1.8%)
Laos	1	0	0	0	1 (.6%)
Mongolia	1	2	0	0	3 (1.8%)
New Zealand	1	0	0	0	1 (.6%)
Philippines	1	0	0	0	1 (.6%)
Peru	3	2	0	0	5 (3%)
Russia	3	2	0	0	5 (3%)
Saudi Arabia	0	1	0	0	1 (.6%)
Spain	0	3	0	0	3 (1.8%)
Thailand	3	2	0	0	5 (3%)
Turkey	1	0	0	0	1 (.6%)
					Total = 164 = 100%

Concerning the under-inclusion of other cultures in classrooms, Horii (2015) writes that:

> *"Students may only look at dominate languages and cultures in the world, passively accept[ing] stereotypical differences that do not trouble them because to their eyes, all the linguistic and cultural differences are located overseas, and thus, they overlook and ignore the linguistic and cultural plurality within their own community" (pp. 157-158).*

Horii's point emphasizes a problematic area in the texts: the lack of cultural representation for minority groups within Japan. Although Japanese cultural artifacts comprise nearly half of all artifacts in the four textbooks, each of these items reflects mainstream or traditional Japanese culture. This focus on monoculturalism neglects the diversity of people within Japan, 2.97 million of whom belong to minority or indigenous groups (Sousa, 2019). Diversity within a culture is often seen as a resource or

positive benefit in education, however, Liddicoat (2013) notes that for Japan, national responses to diversity include reinforcing the hegemony of the dominate group. Immigrant and Indigenous languages in Japan are seen as part of national heritage, but are simultaneously ignored, resulting in "the indigenous group being subsumed into the mainstream" (Liddicoat, 2013, p. 203). Thus, both global and national multiculturalism in the texts are limited.

Conclusion

This critical analysis analyzed cultural references, visual representations, languages, and linguistic choices of cultural descriptions in the *Let's Try* and *We Can* series (MEXT, 2018a; 2018b; 2018c; 2018d), which were found to center Japanese culture despite being designed to promote multiculturalism and global thinking. In particular, the ways in which countries outside of Japan appear frequently in over-simplified or stereotypical mediums, textually and visually, are evident.

As language education is always infixed in sociopolitical contexts (Shin & Kubota, 2010), the texts' lack of authentic representations of cultures outside of Japan and of non-traditional cultures within Japan echoes observations of intercultural Japanese communication, which has been posited as a way to inject Japanese worldviews into global discourses, rather than working reciprocally to exchange cultures globally (Liddicoat, 2013). Looking through a CDA lens, elements of this ideology seem present in dialogues between characters and in monologues where textbook characters share their love of Japan (and no other countries). A focus on monoculturalism also negates important inclusions of diversity within Japan, as there are no mentions of minority or indigenous groups in Japan in these texts. In this same vein, the textbooks do not integrate cultures or create a multicultural environment. For example, there are no examples within the texts of a Japanese student living abroad as the textbooks focus on tourist-centered experiences. Languages are over-simplified in a similar manner. This may affect students' experiences in the world; because coders determined ethnical representations to be, on the whole, nebulous, students might feel excluded or distanced from other cultures. This would be especially true of minority students living in Japan. These emphases neglect true multiculturalism.

Lastly, although *Let's Try* and *We Can* offer students exposure to different languages and cultures, neither teachers nor students are provided with meaningful talking points to talk deeply about these topics. The lack of discussion on culture and language beyond the literal examples in the textbooks "fail[s] to foster the appreciation of cultural differences in a constructive manner and are inappropriate for the development of intercultural awareness" (Dendrinos, 2015, p. 36). The dialectical interaction of materials with actual practices in the classroom can affect how students perceive other cultures, people within and beyond Japan, and themselves.

Although in-depth discussion of possible revisions to the texts and materials is beyond the scope of this paper, researchers have offered numerous suggestions for teachers in Japan going forward. Horii (2015), for example, calls for multilingual textbooks and classes that allow students to learn languages other than English. Davidson (2019) also suggests supplementing textbooks with diverse materials, engaging in guided class reflections, and promoting local engagement with non-Japanese community members.

This study contributes to the understanding of multicultural/lingual education and international representation in Japan. As multilingualism and multiculturalism are two tools that can be used to combat biases in society, it is my hope that future learning materials will balance multicultural materials and recognize diversity within and beyond Japan. In doing so, students can begin to think more critically about cultures, languages, themselves, and the world, contributing to an education that is truly global.

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Appendix

Visual Images

Figure 5 *Let's Try 2* (MEXT, 2018b) cover

Figure 6 *We Can 1* (MEXT, 2018c) cover

Figure 7 *We Can 2* (MEXT, 2018d) cover

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i The *Hi, Friends!* series was previously used throughout Japan and have been included as "bridges" between knowledge gaps in the backs of the *We Can* series. The teacher manuals (MEXT, 2018efgh) explain that the *Hi, Friends!* supplementary materials may be used to fill in missing information and occasionally include lesson plan ideas that include these materials. Davidson & Liu (2018) have explored culturally-insufficient contents of these texts.
ii based on names or contextual evidence.
iii with the exception of Sophia, who talks about a carnival, seen in Table 3.

iv For example, teaching natural conversation responses or blending languages (asking ''Why?'' in English and answering in Japanese, etc.).

v Figures 2 and 3 are screenshots of videos from *We Can 1* and *We Can 2*. Figure 2 shows Laksh and Saki and figure 3 shows Muhammad.

vi In *Let's Try 1*, interpretations of dark-skinned illustrations ranged from 10-12 while interpretations of light-skinned illustrations ranged from 150-189; in *Let's Try 2*, interpretations of dark-skinned illustrations ranged from 13-16 while light-skinned illustrations were estimated between 291-320; in *We Can 1*, dark-skinned illustrations ranged from 25-59 and light-skinned interpretations ranged from 306-321.