Imagined Communities of English Use in JET Programme Teaching Materials

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Abstract

Visualizing oneself joining imagined communities of target language (TL) use represents a potent motivation for language study. Given that rationales for the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme include fostering internationalization, a student-centered classroom, and communicative skills, teaching to promote learners envisioning themselves gaining access to different imagined social groups via the TL is further warranted in this program. Yet no research has examined the actual role of imagined TL communities in JET teaching. This project responded by investigating how JET participants foster imagined communities of English use among learners. Materials produced by JET teachers from across Japan were collected with a content analysis being undertaken to determine how they portrayed connections between the language and social group participation. Results of this analysis of 5079 teaching materials indicated that most (2783) involved language practice divorced from social connections. The remainder ran the gamut from lessons in which social group information was tangential and not connected to particular language to a smaller number in which connections between language and potential future social group participation were strong. These results suggest that the possibility of leveraging connections between language and social group participation to promote imagined communities of TL use among learners is possible within the JET paradigm and that this avenue for learner motivation could be further exploited. Given the importance of these findings for motivation coupled with the adoption of initiatives similar to JET across Asia, these results have implications both within and outside of the JET Programme.

Keywords: English language teaching (ELT), JET Programme, hidden curriculum, identity, imagined community, motivation

Picturing oneself participating in imagined communities via target language (TL) use can be a strong motivation for exerting the effort needed in language study. The research presented here investigated the role of this important phenomenon in the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme. Despite parallels between JET Programme goals and the benefits in fostering connections between TL study and future social group participation among learners, no research has investigated the role of imagined communities of TL use within this program. The research discussed here addresses this gap. In this study JET teaching materials were collected from official JET websites and were subjected to a content analysis to ascertain how they promoted imagined communities of language use. This approach is valuable since these materials have actually been used in the classroom by JET participants and because they have been subsequently posted as examples of best practices for others to follow. This study is also important because initiatives similar to JET are now popular across Asia. In presenting this study, this paper introduces the notion of the imagined community, discusses its importance in language education, presents the background of the JET Programme, details the research questions and methodology used, and presents the results. The paper concludes by considering the implications of these results within the JET Programme and beyond.

Literature Review

Imagined Communities

An *Imagined community* is defined as a social group with which one identifies but having an extensive population of members most of whom one will never actually meet (Winer, 2020). Future selfhood represents an important aspect of imagined communities. The potential for imagined community participation at some later time provides an impetus for individuals to pursue various fields of endeavor that take time to master. For example, in engineering, imagined communities can represent an attraction for female engineers and engineering aspirants who seek to be included by a heavily masculine imagined community (Foor & Walden, 2009). In a study of immigrants to Britain, a future self-aligned with imagined communities of the working professional figured as a motivation (Li & Simpson, 2013). In research about graduate students of psychology, perceptions of a future self in an imagined community of practitioners served as motivation for overcoming various challenges associated with doctoral study (Park & Schallert, 2020). The potency of the imagined professional community is perhaps most aptly demonstrated by the history of science in which an international imagined community, a "republic of letters," transcending national borders formed the cornerstone of the scientific ideal of the late Enlightenment (Mayhew, 2005). Such perceptions of the imagined community continue to hold sway in science (Johnson, 2007).

Language learners invariably envision an imagined community of TL users, making the concept important in language education. Choi (2018) notes that imagination "makes learners determine what kinds of practices are worth struggling for and urges them to put forth efforts to achieve their desired or anticipated visions of community life in the future" (p. 808). Perceptions of gaining membership in such imagined communities via the target language as a dimension of future selfhood can provide important motivation for language learners (Norton & Pavlenko, 2019). There are numerous examples of the links between imagined communities and language learning. One study found that integration into an imagined community of Mandarin speakers represented an important factor prompting study of the language for heritage language learners (Leeman, 2015). Work with multilingual speakers of African languages indicated that a classroom embracing translanguaging capitalized upon learners' future hopes of participation in an imagined multilingual community (Makalela, 2015).

Involvement in imagined virtual communities online represents an especially salient attraction for many language learners since online communities are more accessible to the EFL learner than foreign countries and because such communities are exciting (Reinhardt, 2019). For example, one project documented how English learners in Hong Kong used the target language to participate in an imagined community of Wikipedia authors with increased motivation and acquisition of relevant language skills (King, 2015). Among a group of university-level Japanese learners, English study articulated with their goal of attaining entry into an imagined community of engineers (Yashima, 2013). In a study of Korean immigrants to the United States, the role of English in facilitating entry into an imagined cosmopolitan social space represented a strong motivation for learning the language (Song, 2010). The role of imagined communities is so powerful in language learning that it is now considered by some scholars to represent one critical dimension of second language acquisition theory (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016). It is clear that language learner identification with an imagined community of target language users can represent a powerful force impacting learner investment in language study.

Taking communities in which learners may desire participation into account is thus one potent way that the language teacher can capitalize upon this phenomenon. This was demonstrated in one approach in which teachers asked learners about their future hoped-for academic writing community membership with instruction then being tailored for the language use associated with the communities in question; increased motivation and language proficiency resulted (Andrew & Romova, 2012). One study with Japanese university learners demonstrated the value to learning and motivation in having them visualize themselves as future English users participating in communities such as scientists or policy makers while setting specific goals for their language use (Munezane, 2015). When English classes fail to provide instruction grounded in the language and cultural practices of communities into which learners desire entry, not only can motivation suffer but learners can experience tremendous stress if they do ultimately find themselves immersed in such communities, but are unprepared (Lee, 2014). Problematic imagined community teaching can result in barriers as well. An imagined community of English centered on the idealized native speaker can stand in the way of learners adopting a stance more in line with reality in which most speakers are language learners, an imagined community into which they can more easily fit (Wang, 2015). Importantly, the teaching of particular genres of language use such as giving formal speeches or authoring academic essays, while common, should also link these language forms to the specific audiences with which they are most commonly seen in order to take advantage of the language-imagined community link (Andrew & Romova, 2012). Such an approach supports communicative language education given the importance of the sociolinguistic dimension of overall communicative competence (Savignon, 2017).

Besides intentional teaching, it is also important to consider the potential role of the hidden curriculum in fostering imagined communities among learners. The hidden curriculum involves all that is taught in formal schooling, whether intended or not (Azimpour & Khalilzade, 2015). Research has illustrated the connections between the hidden curriculum and imagined communities in language education. For example, one study of ELT texts used in Taiwan found that US culture was not only emphasized at the expense of other cultures, but that texts presented an idealized and sanitized version of this culture (Chao, 2011). Another study found that ELT texts used in Iranian high schools depicted males as more active and worthwhile than females (Gharbavi & Mousavi, 2012). Research has also documented a hidden curriculum of such gender biases in Japanese ELT texts (Lee, 2014).

The JET Programme and its Goals

This study considered the role of teaching materials from the Japanese Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme in promoting connections between English language use and imagined community participation among learners. Begun in 1987, JET currently involves 5277 language teachers from 50 countries (JET Programme, 2022). These are short-term positions: JET participants are hired on one-year contracts with the possibility of extension typically up to a maximum of three years (JET Program USA, 2019). Participants teach elementary through high school learners along with some adults across Japan. One goal of JET is to promote improved language acquisition via communicative methods (Nakao, Oga-Baldwin, & Fryer, 2019). Another objective is to make the traditional teacher-centered classroom in Japan more student centered. An official government publication for JET participants states that they should "[k]eep the class student-centered at all times" (CLAIR, 2013, p. 18). Fostering language "authenticity" is another central JET Programme goal. The program recruits native speakers on this grounds, especially to promote authentic pronunciation and grammar. A JET publication states "[y]our accent and pronunciation are authentic, and will improve students' ability to understand native speakers when they are speaking" (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2013, p. 53). The other important goals of JET are internationalization and the promotion of an intercultural stance among learners (JET Programme, 2020; Sponseller, 2016). JET has proven influential with similar programs being adopted across Asia. These include the English Programme in Korea (EPIK), the English Program Sichuan (EPS) in China, the Native English-speaking Teacher (NET) scheme in Hong Kong, and the Foreign English Teachers (FET) program in Taiwan (Turnbill, 2018).

Although the JET Programme does not explicitly invoke the notion of imagined communities of language use in its design, its objectives align with and could be furthered by their promotion. Equipping learners to interact in different social situations is, as noted, critical for communicative competence which *is* an explicit JET goal. Likewise, understanding learners' own hoped for future imagined community participation fits impeccably with the JET objective of promoting student-centeredness. Undertaken from the 1950s, Paulo Freire's (2018) approach for the empowerment of learners – a cornerstone of student-centered philosophies - rests upon fashioning a pedagogy responsive to their goals rather than those of teacher or institution. Such goals indicate the value in JET of understanding learners' own hoped for social group membership via TL use as an imagined community and responding with instruction tailored to fostering the corresponding language competencies. The internationalization and interculturalism mission of JET also has implications for promoting imagined communities of target language use. JET explicitly instructs teachers to include a cultural dimension in their classroom materials. The program especially speaks of the role of the participant as a "cultural ambassador" for the learners (Turnbill, 2018). Yet little is known about how rank and file JET participants construe these instructions in their teaching.

It might seem preferable to prepare these learners for interaction with real here and now groups rather than for future TL-contingent imagined community participation. Yet, until any such preparation is complete, the groups with which one is preparing to interact remain imagined with hoped for future participation bearing an important motivational load (Choi, 2018). Most of the learners with whom JET participants work are far from possessing the language competency for actual TL interaction since they are in their first few years of language study. Indeed, a fundamental rationale for JET is to provide willing and level-appropriate interlocutors in the form of the assistant language teacher (ALT), especially given the move in Japan to initiate English study in the elementary years and to focus more heavily on oral communication

practice during this initial phase of language study (Nakao et al., 2019). Until they gain sufficient language competency, the hoped for future self as imagined community participant thus represents a critical sustaining force for language learners such as those served by JET.

Despite the power of imagined communities in language learning, the ostensible alignment of JET Programme goals with promoting TL-based imagined community visualization, and the potential for JET materials to include information about a wide variety of imagined communities as part of the teaching of culture, the literature is silent on the role of JET in fostering imagined communities of target language use among learners. Such research is important in promoting best practices. It can do so by documenting how JET materials may couple participation in imagined communities with English language competency. It can point out any important shortcomings along these lines as well. It can also support a more mature theorization of the relationship between language teaching materials and imagined communities of target language use. In light of the foregoing discussion, this study focuses upon the following research questions.

Overall Question: What is the role of JET Programme materials in promoting connections between English language use and imagined community membership?

1. What assessments of learners' hoped for imagined community membership are provided in JET teaching materials to guide language instruction?
2. How do JET materials provide instruction in specific language skills tailored to interaction with particular social groups?
3. What are the implications of portrayals of culture - whether incidental or explicit - in these materials for promoting imagined communities of English use among learners?

Method

Data was sourced from official JET Programme online venues for sharing best practices in the form of teaching plans and accompanying materials. This project collected 5079 materials accessible during 2021-2022 from the various such prefectural venues across Japan. There was no sampling scheme used; instead, all available materials were collected. This strengthened the results by allowing the project to determine the prevalence of phenomena within this important corpus. For example, the attention to language skills associated with particular social groups (Question 2) could thus be characterized in terms of its frequency within all shared JET Programme materials across Japan. Harvesting all available materials also lent itself to an inductive analysis, one in which results emerge from the data. Such an approach provides strong results because important findings are less likely to be missed (Veers & Gillam, 2020). For example, had the research taken a more deductive perspective by collecting only materials explicitly claiming to be about culture, incidental depictions of culture such as images of currency from specific countries included in shopping role plays would have been missed. This inductive approach is especially warranted in shedding light on the hidden curriculum given its unstated nature. Analyzing a large corpus such as this one also increases the possibility of harvesting noteworthy exceptions to general trends. Considering materials used across Japan also provides insight into their impact upon an entire generation of learners across the country.

The materials themselves included lesson plans, handouts, PowerPoints, video and audio files, flashcards, and similar resources intended for JET Programme teaching at the elementary through high school levels with some lessons for adults as well. These materials also represent an apt resource for this study since they had actually been used in the classroom. This differs

from official texts which may be transformed or ignored at the actual classroom level. Additionally, the creators posted these materials as exemplars for other JET teachers. Disseminating such materials is important given the relatively short tenure of the typical JET coupled with the fact that most have no training as teachers (Morita, 2017). Thus, other JET participants use these materials, further enhancing their impact. Also, there has been an increase in non-JET ALTs in Japan in recent years. Like their JET counterparts, they also typically lack training as teachers and need teaching materials like these tailored to learners of English (Haye-Matsui, 2018).

A content analysis of these materials was conducted based upon the research questions. This took place from late 2021 and was completed in 2022. For Question 1, examples of guidance in assessing learners' interest in social group participation via English to tailor instruction appropriately were sought. Such assessments could take various forms. For example, educators have used interviews with learners to understand TL-using groups with which they identify (Norton, 2015). Since the ALT may not be fluent in Japanese, the corpus was also examined for evidence that hoped for community participation had been elicited in the L1, especially by the Japanese teachers of English with whom ALTs always work. Specifically, a search for any reference to the use of such assessment results in the instructions accompanying the materials represented part of the analysis.

For Question 2, analysis strove to identify instances of language instruction tailored for specific social groups, for particular social situations, or representing specific genres of language use. Successful fostering of an imagined community-language link in this case would involve both practice in the language form in question coupled with a means to promote learners' association of that form with a particular socially situated usage.

For Question 3, materials were examined for portrayals of culture. These not only included cultural items typical in language education materials such as depictions of the arts, foods, and celebrations but also aspects of "little c" culture such as everyday cultural items and behaviors (Kovács, 2017). The research especially drew upon the notion of "banal culture" or the culture of the commonplace such as which nation's currency units might be used in discussing prices (Morsli & Riche, 2019). The analysis was also sensitive to all scales of culture from supra-national culture to sub-cultural groups within countries. Analysis considered images used in these materials in addition to text because of their ability to convey important social information (Aillo, 2006) and to have a more powerful emotional impact than text (Ademilokun & Olateju, 2015).

Results and Discussion

Use of Assessments of Learners' Hoped For Social Group Participation

Research Question 1 pertained to the use of assessments designed to understand learners' hoped for future social group participation in order to tailor language instruction accordingly. The analysis of the 5079 materials revealed no such assessments being used by the teachers. Indeed, few assessments of any form created to better understand learners such as assessments of vocabulary knowledge, grammatical skill, and listening/pronunciation ability were included. The plans also did not make reference to any such assessments conducted by other parties such as the Japanese teachers of English. This suggests that assessment-guided instruction does not represent an important feature of JET.

Instruction in Language Skills Connected with Participation in Particular Social Groups

Research Question 2 concerned the teaching of language skills connected with participation in particular social groups, situations, or genres. Analysis of the materials corpus indicated that the most prevalent type of materials was those promoting language skills but having no such connections. Such activities comprised 55% of this corpus (2783 of the 5079 materials). Examples included vocabulary bingo games in which the teacher read words aloud, an activity in which learners drew pictures to convey the meanings of prepositions such as *under* and *on*, an activity in which learners unscrambled sentences, phonics activities in which the learners decoded letters of the alphabet, and a classroom grammar game in which learners filled blanks with the correct word forms such as *hard* vs. *hardly*.

The remaining 2296 materials did include various types of social group information. Table 1 enumerates these results. In 803 of these 2296 materials (35%), instruction in language genres that could be associated with particular social groups or specific social situations *was* provided, but groups or situations in which they could be used were not made explicit (Table 1, #1). For example, in one lesson learners were taught how to write a "cause and effect essay." These materials included a lesson plan for other teachers to follow, presentation slides for classroom use, a handout for learners, and a rubric for evaluation. The lesson provided many details, including vocabulary and structure of this discourse form. It instructed learners to begin such a piece of writing with general statements followed by a thesis statement for the introduction, two subsequent paragraphs starting with the words *first* and *second*, and a conclusion paragraph beginning with the phrase *in conclusion*. They were instructed how to use words including *as a result, not only, therefore*, and *furthermore*. While the lesson thus taught learners the *mechanics* of this form of writing, it provided them with no sense of the social situations in which such a writing genre would be appropriate.

Table 1

The Four Types of Materials with Imagined Community Implications Found in the Corpus

Type of Material/Percentage within materials having social group information	Example	Language Skills Taught	Associated Social Group	Why Example Fits Type
1. Instruction in Language Genres with no Social Group Connections Provided/35%	Writing a Cause and Effect Essay	Academic Essay Writing	Used in Academia	Essay form taught with no target social group
2. Imagining TL-Based Group Participation with no Language Taught/1%	Imagined Interaction with "Foreigners" in Japan	None	"Foreigners"	Target social group provided with no specific language form
3. Language Taught *with* Explicit Social Group Connections/17%	Writing a Business Letter	Business Letter Language	Business People	Connection made between language form and target social group
4. Cultural Information Only Provided with no Language Connection/47%	Passing Mention of France and Eiffel Tower	None	French People and/or Tourists Implied	Cultural information about France provided, but with no link to language use

Another lesson taught the basics of debate. Given a prompt such as *Which Food is Healthier, Western or Eastern?* It instructed learners to brainstorm a set of pros and cons for the topic. It provided an organizational framework into which learners could place the resulting material prior to presenting it. In this case, the lesson instructed them to convince their classmates of a position. It did not tell them how these skills might be used with people outside of the classroom. Other examples included how to give directions around a town, but no indication of when a person in Japan would use these English skills: Was the idea to speak with visitors to Japan, to be ready for travel abroad, or something else? Likewise, there were numerous lessons pertaining to shopping with learners practicing playing the roles of customers and clerks. Again, though, no explicit connection was made between the language and socially situated use.
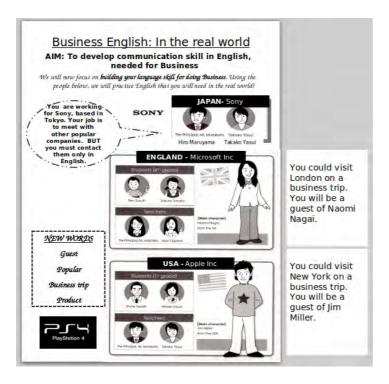
A final type of language genre with potential imagined community implications was that pertaining to science. Some of these lessons were associated with the so-called "Super Science" schools in Japan. In these schools, STEM classes form a focus with technical and scientific topics being used to make connections across the curriculum, including the English class. These activities included making research reports as well as conducting science experiments and reporting the results in English, either in written or oral form. Yet, in the English lessons about science there was no attention to providing learners with connections to future social group

participation. Instead, as with the materials discussed above, the focus was simply upon language form, especially vocabulary and the format of reports. Such lessons thus involved the "hows" of language, but not the "whens" and "whys." Given the potency of the imagined community of language learning, providing some information about possible future avenues to use the language in question, or, perhaps better yet, asking learners to brainstorm them in a discussion could have potent motivational implications. Perhaps some learners might have neighbors or family members who use English in such capacities, and they could share these stories. Such moves would take little time away from addressing other instructional goals and would help to cement the student-centered mission of JET while promoting the link between imagined communities and the TL.

In contrast to these lessons providing language instruction without supplying possible avenues of future social use, a few materials involved the opposite situation: Such materials asked the learner to imagine communicating with members of particular social groups using English, but with no specific language norms being provided beyond the idea of employing the TL itself (Table 1, #2). These materials comprised only 24 of the 2296 materials with social group information (1%). Most of these materials were activities asking learners to imagine talking to "foreigners" within Japan. Some of these asked learners to explain elements of Japanese culture. For example, one material required learners to present the use of the traditional *furoshiki* wrapping cloth. Another such lesson asked the learners to present "strange Japanese foods" to foreigners in Japan. Such scenarios constructed the imagined foreigner in Japan as a short-term visitor knowing little about Japan, not speaking Japanese, and proficient in English. This could be a bit unrealistic: For example, one of these lessons assumed that the foreign visitor to Japan did not know about sushi. In fact, one teacher recommended in their plan that the teacher should feign confusion about Japan in order to create such situations in the classroom. In another example of such materials, the teacher discussed an effort to have English club students within Japan communicate with each other using English.

Within the overall corpus, 390 of the 2296 materials (17%) bearing social group information did provide instruction in language connected to participation in explicit social situations (Table 1, #3). A good example was a collection of materials for a class in business English. Included in the materials was a PowerPoint presentation for the teacher's use. This presentation stressed that learners would be encountering English for the real world. In this lesson, learners role played workers in Sony Japan, Microsoft in England, or Apple in the US (Figure 1). The activities included making presentations to a specific audience and writing business letters to people from these companies. The lesson supplied appropriate language for these social situations. In this way, the lesson empowered learners with connections between specific language/language genres (such as the business letter) and possible future social group participation in which to deploy it. Such an approach would bolster the imagined community of target language use among learners.

Figure 1

Promoting an Imagined Community of Business English Use

Other examples of strong language/social group connections included one set of materials centering upon writing letters to pen pals abroad. The lesson provided learners with a letter template and instructed them to present topics possibly of interest to their audience such as details about their school lives. Another example taught language important for a home stay in an English-speaking context. One lesson provided language used for "speed dating" in which learners created a profile page with entries for their personal information. Several examples provided instruction in language associated with specific social groups within the larger English-speaking world. These included one lesson about New Zealand English with lexical items including *bloke, knackered*, and *lollies*. Another lesson presented differences between American and British English lexicon with examples such as *apartment* vs. *flat* and *elevator* vs. *lift*. A final example pertaining to language variety was a lesson on Hawaiian English. In this case, the lesson made connections between the Japanese language and Hawaiian creole by presenting uses of Japanese words like *tako* (octopus) and *hana* (nose) in Hawaii in a strong example of instructional scaffolding. Yet, varieties of English from outside of the traditional English-speaking countries – such as that spoken in the Philippines – were not presented in any of these materials. It was also notable that few (about 2%) of the 2296 materials linking specific language and social groups/situations were from elementary school materials.

Some materials in this category – though they did link language and putative social group participation – invoked situations unlikely for learners' future participation. One involved a situation in which learners role played making presentations to the UN as ambassadors to various countries. Another presented the scenario of writing English messages in high school yearbooks, something not part of the Japanese high school experience. In another case, learners used language to write a plan for people to escape a zombie attack. A final example presented a scenario in which the learners role played deceased individuals tasked with convincing God of their merit for entering heaven. Vocabulary in this case included deeds and misdeeds and various examples that could fall under each such as killing, stealing, lying, rescuing a person,

and engaging in illegal content downloading. While such lessons failed to promote the target language as a resource for participation with members of accessible imagined communities, they may have added interest and levity to the classes. Language skills acquired via these activities could also transfer to broader situations. Yet, again, simply asking the learners to brainstorm real-world situations in which these skills could also be used would have been beneficial; Conducted in the L1, such a discussion could forge connections between language studied and imagined social group participation. Conducted in the TL, it could also promote communication and additional learning of lexis.

Cultural Information and the World of English

Question 3 concerned the role of portrayals of culture in promoting imagined communities of language use. This study provides evidence that this phenomenon is widespread. Materials with cultural components – but not included in the previous analyses – comprised 1079 of the 2296 materials (Table 1, #4), making them the most common type of materials with social group information (47%). This cultural information was often "background" or "tangential" with lessons not asking learners to make any connection between this information and their language production. In some cases, learners talked *about* certain places and cultural groups, but did not practice using language to imagine interacting with people from these places. Examples included a lesson in which the teacher gave cards with the names of countries to learners. They then asked/answered two questions posed by a partner based upon the specific country card held. The lesson provided the following model:

> Learner A: What country would you like to visit?
> Learner B: I would like to visit France.
> Learner A: Why do you want to visit France?
> Learner B: I want to see the Eiffel Tower.

Images played an especially prominent role in this category of materials. For example, a handout about the months of the year included an image of the flag of Ireland and children in Halloween costumes for the month of October and a flag of the US with a family having Thanksgiving dinner for the month of November. In this case, learners were simply asked the month of their birthdays with these images taking on no explicit function beyond the decorative. This was the case for many of the images included. While it is possible that such materials could foster imagined communities of language use in a general sense, the lack of strong connections between specific language and engagement with individuals from particular groups indicates that many opportunities to promote such connections were missed.

More problematic is the fact that these cultural materials were biased. Beyond a strong focus on Japanese culture, most of the cultural materials pertained to the traditional English-speaking countries, especially the UK and US. In a lesson in which learners discussed movie genres, all the examples were from UK or US movies such as James Bond films or Titanic with the only exception being one Japanese movie. In this way, the cultural information presented in these materials failed to represent the breadth of English speakers.

These findings are significant for several reasons. Overall, they demonstrate a lack of attention to fostering connections between language study and imagined communities of language use in the JET Programme. Scholarship in language education indicates that doing so would increase learner motivation, ownership of the language, and preparation for real-world language use. Shortcomings with each of these are endemic to Japanese ELT (e.g., Knodell,

2017). The failure to provide any assessments regarding groups with whom learners would like to use the language is especially glaring since tapping into the TL/imagined community connection is a cogent motivational scheme.

This study is also significant in providing evidence that JET currently is missing important opportunities to meet its own goals. Making greater efforts to forge connections between language and social group participation would advance the JET objectives of promoting communicate language teaching, bringing culture into the classroom, and making classes more student centered. The decoupling of language and social situations manifest in these results is important to note: Over half of the materials collected provided no information about social use of the language at all. Scholars have widely attributed such shortcomings in social language use practice to the high-stakes exam system used in Japan (Mitchell, 2017). Thus, these results may offer one more critique of this system applicable both within and beyond Japan. This study is also significant in providing evidence that in consistently aligning English-speaking imagined communities with the native speaker, the imagined communities promoted in these materials do not best reflect those with whom the typical Japanese learner is most likely to interact using English. This is at odds with current thought in teaching English as an international language (EIL). Finally, these results are significant in pointing up the potential for issues such as those detailed here to arise in programs similar to JET across Asia. They certainly suggest that adding NS teachers to the classroom does not represent a panacea for Asian ELT.

Recommendations

This study suggests some important recommendations for ELT practice. Notable among these findings was the lack of attention to learner input in determining possible social situations and groups upon which to focus in classes. In light of the ostensible commitment to a student-centered classroom in JET, such actions would represent one additional avenue for meeting this objective by tailoring instruction to the groups with whom learners would eventually like to use the language. This is also true beyond JET in any initiative with such a commitment to the learner-centered approach.

Another area for improvement pertains to the language skills evidenced in these materials. Even though applied linguists recognize sociolinguistic competence as a core component of communicative competence, these materials reflected little attention to connecting language with participation in specific social groups and events. The role of imagined communities of language use was especially weak in elementary school lessons. This would seem to particularly represent a missed opportunity to tap into the imagination, lower inhibition, and propensity for language play to explore relationships between language and social group participation characteristic of the youngest cohort of learners (Hà, 2022). It is not difficult to imagine activities capitalizing upon these tendencies such as role plays in which learners take on identities of people from particular locales and use English lexis or pronunciation common to those groups. This analysis also demonstrates the tendency to teach language form divorced from its social functions. Many lessons taught learners the "hows" of language such as how to make an argument but failed to present the "whens" and "whys" of actual socially situated use: The lack of attention to when, why, and with whom one would use such language represented a glaring oversight in such lessons.

Another lost opportunity was a lack of lessons about language use in virtual communities. Despite the fact that the materials collected were all posted within the last few years, no lessons

made connections between language and such online uses as social media, email, and discussion groups. This is especially baffling since such communities would seem to represent the most likely venue for TL use among these learners. EFL programs such as those in Japan are taught in locales in which English is not a language of wider communication, making the inclusion of attention to language use for imagined virtual communities especially worthwhile as a ready avenue for learner TL use.

Programs like JET should more carefully prepare learners for interaction with likely interlocutors. For the person from Asia, the most likely interlocutors are not native speakers of English. Besides providing better training and materials for teachers, one way to address the issue is to broaden the recruitment of JET participants to encompass more countries. Because JET instructs participants that their role includes that of "cultural ambassador," they often taught about the country where they held citizenship: Many materials in this corpus included instructions to "talk about your country" as a means for the teacher to present culture. Recruitment beyond the traditional English-speaking countries would thus naturally go far to address this shortcoming in JET and similar "foreign teacher" programs. Greater representation of sub-cultures within countries is also important. The Hawaiian English material in this corpus represents one example. More such efforts are needed and would benefit learners by exposing them to interesting groups while also disabusing them of the counterproductive notion that language (and culture) are – or should be - uniform within national boundaries.

This study yields implications for assessment as well. High-stakes English tests in Japan tend to focus on explicit grammatical knowledge or formulaic writing and speaking tasks with little attention to adapting language use to a variety of social situations (e.g., Brown, 2017). The present study provides evidence that this is still the case. The tendency must be rectified, especially given the ostensible and longstanding commitment of Japanese ELT to "communicative" teaching.

Conclusion

Given the importance of imagined communities of language use in motivating language study, a corpus of 5079 JET Programme teaching materials was collected and subjected to a content analysis for this study. Results indicated that most of the materials collected included no social group information promoting imagined communities associated with the TL. Instead, activities such as vocabulary and grammar drills as well as games with language divorced from social situatedness represented the majority. Among the remaining materials, although some forms of social group information were included, few provided a clear link between specific language instruction and access to particular social situations. Such materials represented only a bit less than 8% of the entire corpus. About 1000 of the materials contained tangential cultural information such as images of international places but with no specific connections to language. Most of these cultural materials featured depictions of the traditional English-speaking countries. Notably, materials promoting connections between specific forms of language and potential social group participation were especially rare in elementary school materials.

Missed opportunities formed a theme in these results. Connections between language being studied and possible social groups in which this language could be used which would set the stage for learners to imagine themselves as group participants using the TL were few. Although lessons lacking social group connections may have other value, the impact of such lessons could be enhanced by promoting a (stronger) connection between the lessons and imagined

communities of future participation. Given the zero-sum nature of classroom time and finite reservoirs of learner effort, maximizing the value of any lesson in such a way is critical.

The results of this study suggest an untapped potential of JET and similar programs in which teachers from abroad are recruited to promote communicative language use among learners. Fostering the possibility of participation in imagined communities of target language use as part of learners' future, hoped for selves represents a natural outgrowth of the JET paradigm. This study shows that JET teachers are heavily involved not simply in instruction, but in creating lesson plans and associated materials. This study also shows that JET lessons typically involve opportunities for the learner to use the target language actively. These two aspects of JET open the door for the incorporation of language practice coupled with imagined social group participation such as by leveraging role plays designed to raise learners' consciousness about matching language to people. In doing so, the teacher would not only motivate the learner by promoting a future hoped for social self but would incorporate a sociolinguistic dimension into instruction thus ensuring that learners' language competencies extend beyond strictly asocial language form. Naturally, these possibilities are not limited to work within JET, but apply to any situations in which teachers of any language wish to heighten learner motivation, increase instructional relevance, add variety and excitement to the classroom, and promote the sociolinguistic dimension of language acquisition.

There were several important limitations to this study. This study sought to empirically determine a *de facto* curriculum in JET pertaining to promotion of imagined communities of English use through portrayals of connections between English and various social groups. This study did not focus on how these materials impacted learners. In other words, the focus was on what was taught, but not on what was learned. Likewise, this study did not explicitly address the role of teacher beliefs in the creation of these materials. These two areas represent apt choices for future research. Finally, this study focused solely on Japan. Considering the role of language teaching outside of Japan in promoting connections between the TL and imagined communities is also warranted.

Promoting imagined communities of target language use can represent a potent motivational force in the language classroom. In light of present-day mobility and the ubiquity of the Internet, the likelihood that language learners will have opportunities to interact with individuals using the language of study is greater than ever. It is thus even more incumbent upon teachers than hitherto to tap into the hoped for self as participant in imagined communities of TL use as wellspring of learner motivation and preparation for real world language use. A failure to do so represents opportunity squandered.

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