

Exploring the Development of Intercultural Citizenship: A Holistic Semiotic Analysis of Japanese Junior High School EFL Textbooks

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【Abstract】

To investigate how Intercultural Citizenship is incorporated in the junior high school EFL classroom, the evaluation of textbooks is necessary. This will allow us to discover the extent to which learners are adaptable to new cultural situations and environments, which is an important aspect of the increasingly global community. Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence provides the framework against which a holistic, semiotic evaluation of textbooks can be conducted. A semiotic evaluation provides more context and flexibility than a quantitative lexical analysis would give, and thus would better display how meaning is created by the learner. Results show that while aspects of Intercultural Citizenship are present implicitly in the textbooks, learners' own Intercultural Citizenship is left largely undeveloped.

【Keywords】

Intercultural citizenship, intercultural communication, materials creation, materials assessment, critical pedagogy

1. Introduction

Intercultural Citizenship (IC) is quickly becoming an important part of foreign language education as the link between culture and language is recognized as pivotal for language learners (Byram, 2002). In order to understand how IC is incorporated into EFL education in Japan, a look at junior high school EFL textbooks can provide some generalizability. The Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence developed by Byram (1997) provides the outline against which textbooks can be evaluated in a holistic, semiotic manner. Through this approach, the possible meanings created by learners can be more thoroughly explored, in contrast to a quantitative lexical analysis. The series, textbook, unit, page, dialogue, and word are not treated separately but as a whole, including images, language activities, and mother tongue language explanations. Only through looking at all of these components together can we start to see how learners create meaning from the materials and how that would affect the development of IC. This study looks at all government-approved junior high school EFL textbooks in Japan, and evaluates them for their ability to develop Intercultural Citizenship in learners.

2. Literature Review

2.1 *The Role of Intercultural Citizenship in EFL Education in Japan*

The development of Intercultural Citizenship in foreign language education has become a way of forging a shared identity, such as ‘European’ and ‘American’ identities within the ethnically, racially, and linguistically diverse populations of Europe and the United States (Byram, 2006). As well, many see the promotion of IC as an avenue to help promote the globalization and internationalization of peoples around the world. Despite this advancement, Japan has not made any explicit attempts to incorporate IC into the Course of Study guidelines created by The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) in any meaningful way (Parmenter, 2006). The Course of Study guidelines regarding EFL focus on learning goals or objectives based on linguistic knowledge acquisition, as well as goals regarding how English is to be applied in everyday life (MEXT, 2008). This can be seen explicitly in the Course of Study guidelines from 1989 on, with MEXT stating that the aim of EFL education is ‘to place importance on deepening international understanding and developing an attitude of respect for our country’s (Japan’s) culture and traditions’ (Monbusho, 1989, cited in Parmenter, 2006, p. 146). However, Parmenter (2006) has argued that most of the characteristics of IC education are already present in current citizenship education in Japan through the curriculum and school experience. However,

these characteristics have only been applied at the national level. Parmenter (2006) contends that the possible identity shift that could arise from the development of IC has to first be accepted as a goal of education, either implicitly or explicitly, before it can become a part of the curriculum.

Therefore it can be said that an investigation of the incorporation of IC within Japanese EFL education is limited when looking solely at the Course of Study guidelines created by MEXT. These guidelines do little to change actual classroom practice as there is little oversight of pedagogy; individual schools and municipal or prefectural boards of education implement these guidelines as they see fit. Where the national government has some direct control over classroom content is through the approval of textbooks for use in the classroom. The textbooks approved by MEXT must be utilized to form the core curriculum in public schools, and while not always the sole textbook in private schools, they must at least be distributed to students. Therefore, MEXT can influence the learning process in the EFL classroom by approving or rejecting certain textbooks. In order to more thoroughly investigate the ability of EFL education in Japan to incorporate IC, a look at the MEXT-approved textbooks that are used throughout the nation is preferable. In order to fully evaluate textbooks holistically in a semiotic manner, a theory of development of IC is necessary to be applied as a model to these textbooks.

2.2 Choosing a Learning Model for the Development of Intercultural Citizenship

Byram's 1997 book 'Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence' lays out five objectives which contribute to the development of Intercultural Communicative Competence, which can be considered to be synonymous with IC. These objectives provide the basis for materials creation targeted towards the development of IC in language learners, and thus can provide an outline against which we can evaluate textbooks.

The first area in Byram's Model for Intercultural Communicative Competence (MICC) discusses 'knowledge'. Byram defines this in two broad categories: firstly, "knowledge about social groups and culture in one's own country, and...of an interlocutor's country", and secondly "knowledge of the processes of interaction at individual and societal levels" (1997, p. 35). Increased knowledge of the flexible nature of culture and its differences in groups of people, both at the national level and regarding smaller groups, can increase learner's IC. Textbooks should try to incorporate knowledge of culture, not only at the national level, but as it reflects the flexibility and variability of different cultural groups.

The development of the knowledge about the process of identity formation is more complicated, as it requires learner self-awareness. There should be an “awareness of how one’s ‘natural’ ways of interacting with other people are the ‘naturalized’ product of socialization” (Byram, 1997, p. 52). Therefore, ‘knowledge’ must take cultural information and allow for learners to relativize their own identity with that of others. Having a textbook contrast characters’ cultural background that is manifested as differing personal beliefs and behaviors is a way in which this could be developed.

The next area in the MICC has to do with ‘attitudes towards culture’. Byram defines this as “attitudes towards people who are perceived as different in respect of the cultural meanings, beliefs and behaviors they exhibit, which are implicit in their interaction with interlocutors from their own social group or others” (1997, p. 34). These attitudes can include learner stereotypes and prejudice, both positive and negative, which can influence expectations in communication. Learners that have developed appropriate ‘attitudes’ towards culture are willing to participate in new things, rather than relying on what is familiar. In order to develop these ‘attitudes’, textbooks should encourage learners to learn or experience culture that is not familiar, and be evaluative about culture both familiar and unfamiliar.

The third and fourth areas of Byram’s MICC both deal with ‘skills’, which are divided into skills of ‘discovery and interaction’ as well as skills of ‘interpretation and relation’. Through the skill of ‘discovery and interaction’ a learner can gain “specific knowledge as well as an understanding of the beliefs, meanings and behaviors which are inherent in particular (cultural) phenomena” (Byram 1997, p. 38). When considering the textbook as a source of cultural material, this can be a daunting prospect. However, this discovery process could take place through the use of adapted materials. The use of adapted material as a lens through which cultural beliefs, meanings, and values of a particular culture are discovered is possible given the right guidance by a textbook.

Following the ability of a student to ‘discover and interact’ with culture, the skills of ‘interpretation and relation’ become relevant. A learner should be able to deal with material and recognize the explicit or implicit cultural bias that can occur in both the document and within themselves. This will make any contact with material an exercise in not only linguistic comprehension, but also cultural interpretation. While this proves to be an increasingly difficult objective to achieve in the context of JHS EFL textbooks, it could be possible through a look at adapted materials and a critical evaluation by the learner that is guided by the textbook.

The final area of the MICC deals with ‘political education’, which has learners engage in intercultural situations in accordance with the abilities that they have gained

from the three objectives above. Learners should be able to “interact and mediate in intercultural exchanges in accordance with explicit criteria, negotiating where necessary a degree of acceptance of them by drawing upon one’s knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Byram 1997, p. 53). This area is probably the most difficult to incorporate into a textbook, as it requires the active involvement of a learner in an intercultural situation utilizing their knowledge, skills, and attitudes to make an evaluative judgment. A textbook can help instill political education by having examples of characters engaging with a global issue that they have an ideological viewpoint on, and working towards social justice in that area. Textbooks could also be explicit about encouraging learners to become involved in local or global issues where their ideological viewpoint takes an active role in their participation with other people. Through the use of these objectives regarding the development of IC, we can now evaluate a textbook series based on how these are incorporated and to what degree.

3. Research Design

In order to explore the extent to which JHS textbooks develop learners’ IC, we will look at how the objectives of Byram’s MICC (1997) are incorporated. The extent to which any or all of these objectives are incorporated into EFL textbooks will have a profound effect on the ability of learners in JHS in Japan to develop their IC.

Textbooks at the JHS level were chosen for a variety of reasons. Education in Japanese elementary schools (grades 1-6), while compulsory, just recently added ‘foreign language activities’ as a standardized course for the fifth and sixth grades in 2010. As these classes are relatively new and utilize a single series of two books for the fifth and sixth grade created and published by MEXT itself, it would be relatively limited to investigate the incorporation of IC in EFL education in this way. In addition, senior high school (SHS) education in Japan lasts for three years (grades 10-12) all of which are not compulsory according to the Education Law in Japan, which only requires education until a student is 16 years old. As well, EFL education in SHS can vary greatly for learners. Those who decide to focus on English can take additional courses in English conversation, reading, and grammar in a single school year, while those doing only the most basic EFL curriculum may take only a handful of courses over the three years of SHS. As a result, there are many dozens of MEXT-approved textbooks for a variety of learning purposes that are utilized in SHS EFL classrooms.

However, JHS in Japan lasts for three years (grades 7-9), all of which are compulsory for students in Japan. As well, each year includes a single compulsory English course. This standardization among EFL experiences for learners in Japan

allows us to make better generalizations on how IC is developed through the use of MEXT-approved textbooks. As well, the current group of textbooks for JHS consists of six series of three books each for a total of 18 books, which is a manageable number for the purposes of this study. The six textbook series to be studied are: New Horizon, New Crown, Sunshine, Total English, One World, and Columbus 21, the basic data of which is listed in Table 1. The results of the evaluation for all textbooks will be discussed as well as unique characteristics of individual series, this will be followed by an interpretation of the results.

Table 1 - Data on the six approved JHS EFL textbook series

Textbook	Publisher	National Adoption Rate	First Publication	Total Editorial Board Members	Non-Japanese Members of Editorial Board	Japanese Main Characters	Non-Japanese Main Characters
New Horizon	Tokyo Shoseki	40%	1966	37	3	3	5
New Crown	Sanseido	20%	1961	40	2	3	5
Sunshine	Kairyudo	20%	1986	29	3	4	6
Total English	Gakko Tosho	9%	2002	25	4	2	4
One World	Kyoiku Shuppan	5%	1986	17	2	3	4
Columbus 21	Mitsumura Tosho	2%	1993	21	2	5	3

4. Analysis

4.1 Knowledge of Culture in JHS EFL Textbooks

Knowledge of culture is the most prominent and frequently occurring objective of the MICC that is included in each JHS textbook series. However, despite the relative frequency of knowledge of culture, the way in which cultural knowledge is incorporated is too shallow to fully develop learners' IC.

The most frequent way in which knowledge of culture is incorporated into each series is through the introduction of cultural artifacts, primarily about Japan and to a

lesser extent about foreign cultures. However, by putting focus on culture in Japan and tying examples of culture to the concept of nations, these textbooks provide an oversimplified idea of how culture and nationality are linked. This might lead to learners developing stereotypes of cultures and peoples of certain nations (Kubota, 1998). As well, by providing an un-nuanced look at culture in Japan, the textbooks provide a view that culture and national identity are inextricably linked, enforcing the idea that Japan is a homogenous culture that is shared by all Japanese nationals. The same approach is utilized when discussing cultural artifacts that might be foreign to learners. Without the ability to recognize cultural differences at the national level, IC cannot be fully developed by learners. Culture should be viewed not as a national monolith, but as a flexible, variable system that influences different peoples in different ways, at many levels beyond the nation.

There are notable examples in some series where multilingual, multicultural, and multiethnic populations are viewed in a positive light, but these are relatively minor when compared to instances of culture being divided by nation and explained as fact. In the New Horizon series, Singapore is discussed as being a multiethnic, multicultural, and multilingual country portrayed as a positive experience for its residents. The book states, “Children in Singapore are lucky. Even in kindergarten, they can experience different languages and cultures thanks to their classmates” (Kasajima et. al., 2012, p. 34). As well, individual experiences with foreign culture are typically incorporated through foreign characters and their experiences in Japan, which usually have a positive view of culture in Japan. It is rare that a Japanese character has an experience with a foreign culture that helps shape their identity and worldview. This lack of cultural knowledge undermines the ability of learners to recognize the value of foreign cultures and perspectives.

In most of the textbook series realizing the processes of identity formation through the relativization of cultural experiences happens most often through implicitly contrasting cultural artifacts. Several series look at how objects and practices that might be thought of as ‘native’ to a culture are actually the products of cultural borrowing. In the Total English series, a unit talking about pragmatic differences between the US and UK state, “By learning a foreign language, we can also learn new things about our own language” (Yada et. al., 2011, p. 83). All of these examples help learners recognize the fluid nature of culture and relativize their own experiences. However, the relatively large amount of focus on cultural artifacts without involving personal experiences or allowing learners to explicitly contrast culture would not allow learners to learn about the processes of identity formation and the effect of culture on these processes. Overall,

while knowledge of cultural artifacts are included with regularity and occasionally with some complexity, there is not enough focus on what effect cultural systems have on the individual for learners knowledge of culture to be developed fully, which limits the development of IC.

4.2 Attitudes towards Culture in JHS EFL Textbooks

The development of learner attitudes towards culture appears much less frequently when compared to knowledge of culture, but still occur frequently enough in each series to see some patterns emerge. The most frequent way that this objective is introduced is through the relationships between characters in the textbook series. When confronted with a foreign culture, a character will ask questions to another character who then imparts information about the cultural artifact. This implicitly encourages attitudes of curiosity among learners through examples of peers asking questions about unfamiliar cultural systems. However, usually the interaction ends there, without the character that has learned about the foreign culture giving any opinion. Without showing a character interacting with the new cultural system, the interaction largely does not develop attitudes of openness towards other cultures. There are rare instances in which a character in the textbook describes their own opinion of a culture that is already familiar to them, and even rarer that it is an opinion that encourages learners to be accepting of different cultural systems and values. As well, very few exercises encourage learners to ask questions about a foreign culture themselves, limiting their ability to come into contact with foreign cultural systems that they could possibly accept or evaluate. Therefore attitudes towards culture are not fully developed through dialogues between characters in the textbooks, and no other activities or exercises contribute to the development of this objective. However, some textbook series do have notable exceptions to these norms.

Columbus 21 includes an interesting activity that explores the image of Japan from foreign residents who are interviewed for their opinions about their life in Japan. This unit provides a good chance to see Japan as a multinational country, which goes against perceived Japanese ethnic and national homogeneity. The unit states, “some (foreigners) are new in Japan, but others have lived here for a long time” (Tougo et. al., 2011, p. 12). As well, the impressions about living in Japan are not overwhelmingly positive, as one person describes Japanese people as “shy” (Tougo et. al., 2011, p. 13). Total English as well provides a clear implicit example of a Japanese student’s unfamiliarity with a foreign way of eating, and her accepting of that system shows her willingness to accept alternative cultures. On the following pages the Japanese student

details her experience, which states, “Every culture has its own customs. It’s good to know such customs. I think it is important to understand other cultures” (Yada et. al., 2011, p. 41). New Horizon details the experience of characters from other countries having difficulty with Japanese when they arrive. Rather than portraying foreigners as incapable in communicating in Japanese, the lesson states, “they weren’t afraid of making mistakes and learned from them” (Kasajima et. al., 2012, p. 47), and this allows for openness to new languages and perspectives among learners. In Sunshine, a unit titled “So many countries, so many customs” looks at intercultural communication and the problems that can arise both linguistically and culturally. The last unit of the New Crown series has characters reflect back on their experiences in junior high school in which they talk about their acquisition of cultural knowledge as well as their experience with new cultures that made them better understand their home culture, as well as using English to share and learn about various cultures from around the world. A student even voices her desire “to act as a global citizen” (Takahashi et. al., 2011, p. 95).

The inclusion of examples of characters learning about foreign culture could implicitly encourage learners to become curious. However, very little time is allotted for learners to be directly encouraged to learn new things about another culture. As well, there is almost no inclusion of examples where learners are asked to evaluate or accept other cultural norms, which severely limits the ways in which learners can develop their openness towards culture.

4.3 Political Education in JHS EFL Textbooks

Political Education is occasionally included in a rarified, implicit form in JHS EFL Textbooks, which largely relies on examples of characters participating in political actions. In most cases, this takes the form of examples of famous people, such as Martin Luther King Jr., Jackie Robinson, Mother Teresa, and Audrey Hepburn among others, who acted for the betterment of underprivileged peoples. In other examples, textbook characters or newly introduced fictional or real characters participate in actions for environmental betterment or social justice, such as waste management, recycling, and landmine removal. These implicit examples largely act as positive role models for learners, but come up short of significantly furthering learner’s political education. However, there are instances within the textbooks that call for direct action from learners, which should be looked at in more detail.

New Horizon uses one explicit example in the series that discusses ‘fair trade’ products and encourages learners to consider the choices they make when buying goods. In the New Crown series, there is a description of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima

where the students visit the peace memorial in Hiroshima and express their desire to “think about peace” (Takahashi et. al., 2011, p. 38). Total English includes an example of political education where war as a phenomenon is discussed, with some very direct language indicating that everyday people are partially responsible for war. This unit takes a very strong anti-war stance and puts the responsibility for stopping war on everyday people instead of world leaders. Therefore we can see that Political Education, when it is included at all in these series, is largely implicit in its approach, providing examples of others’ actions to learners, rather than encouraging learners themselves to take action.

4.4 Skills of Discovery and Interpretation in JHS EFL Textbooks

Skills of discovery and interpretation are the most underdeveloped objectives of the MICC in all of the textbook series. There are very few instances of content that was not originally designed for use in the textbook being used in any of the series. The few instances of the inclusion of this cultural content is sheet music for several popular songs which are puzzlingly included in every series. These songs are included with seemingly no purpose, as there are no questions, explanations, or additional activities attached to them, and are placed seemingly at random through the series or on the last pages of a textbook. For an EFL teacher who is pressured by the MEXT guidelines to teach a certain amount of grammatical forms within a school year, these are probably the most easily skipped parts of the entire series. As well, while each series varies with its ability to introduce literature, either original or adapted from a foreign culture, these stories exist only to practice linguistic features or to check comprehension. Some series present a story with no additional activities or questions at all. There is no attempt at any level in any textbook series where learners are encouraged to identify cultural phenomenon within content or to interpret the biases inherent within the material or within themselves in how they evaluate these cultural phenomenon. Therefore any cultural content that has not been explicitly created for the course is included only as it can provide linguistic practice for learners. None of the textbook series studied provide any examples that deviate from this norm. Therefore, skills of discovery and interaction are entirely undeveloped in all of the JHS EFL textbook series.

5. Limitations of the Study

The most evident limitation with a holistic semiotic analysis of a textbook series is that the meanings created from the textbook are subjective to the researcher, and there is a possibility that some misconstruction of meaning has taken place during this study.

However, I am confident from the breadth of the materials involved in this study and the repetition in results from each textbook series that these results are valuable. A verification study by another researcher using similar methods could provide necessary corroboration. Follow-up interviews with teachers and learners at JHS could also provide added depth to this study. As well, to investigate the ways in which the content of the textbooks are actually applied in the classroom with regards to intercultural citizenship, an ethnographic study with participant interview of the incorporation of IC in the EFL classroom would provide added context and verifiability. Finally, a similar study of SHS textbook series could be included to make the study follow learners' academic progression into adulthood, where higher cognitive, linguistic, and social development could allow for IC to be developed more fully.

6. Conclusion

From these results it is evident that JHS EFL textbooks do not develop learner's intercultural citizenship in any significant way. While each series does incorporate knowledge of culture, attitudes towards culture and political education in varying ways with varying effectiveness, these are done in a cursory manner, without a critical approach to the information included in each series. One of the central tenants of intercultural citizenship is that learners should be made to see that their own cultural perspectives and global outlook are products of the social and cultural systems that they have participated in. Without this approach, cultural artifacts presented as stereotypes can quickly become prejudice that is ingrained. As well, without criticality in the perception of one's own culture, the cultural values that are learned become thought of as preferential or even universal, and divergences to that cultural system become deviant and deficient rather than different.

Teachers wishing to make IC an educational goal in their JHS EFL classroom should not look to choose a particular series over another for its approach to IC, but rather find ways to adapt the content already available in each series so that the objectives of IC can be developed. In this way, teachers should encourage learners to question why and how certain cultural artifacts and behaviors have come to exist, including from the learner's own culture. As well, teachers should try to incorporate texts that can be investigated for their cultural value and biases, which are then critically evaluated by the student. Developing IC, even at the JHS level in an EFL classroom, is not something that is beyond the capability of teachers and learners. With the correct understanding of the approach and objectives of how IC can be developed, this can become an obtainable educational goal.

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