

How Globalism is Represented in English Textbooks in Japan

*Kazu Hanashiro**

Awase Special Needs School, Okinawa, Japan

Abstract

This paper explores the portrayal of countries and cultural elements in Japanese EFL high-school textbooks, which may contribute to students' awareness of the varieties of English and understanding of other cultures. Based on Kachru's three-concentric-circle model of English in the world, I examined three textbooks from Japan in order to identify the extent to which English language varieties and cultures are presented to EFL students. The textbooks used were approved by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) in 2013 and have been used in Japanese high schools since April 2014. The findings reveal that these three textbooks are likely to emphasize mostly Inner Circle countries at the expense of Outer Circle countries, and to a lesser extent, Expanding Circle countries. This suggests that certain changes to English textbooks in Japan should be implemented in order to increase students' awareness of the varieties of English spoken in Outer and Expanding Circle countries.

Introduction

Materials used in the classroom, including textbooks, are influential gateways to learning a language and understanding other cultures. This paper explores the portrayal of the countries and cultural elements in Japanese EFL textbooks used in high schools, which contribute to students' awareness of the varieties of English as well as students' understanding of international cultures. I will analyze three textbooks used in Japan in order to demonstrate how English language varieties and cultures are presented to EFL students based on Kachru's three concentric-circles model.

Diversity of English in The World

As English spreads as a dominant international language, countries can be categorized into three groups: Inner Circle countries, Outer Circle countries, and Expanding Circle countries (Kachru, 1992). According to Mckenzie (2008), "each of the three circles represents different types of spread, patterns of acquisition and functions of English in a diversity of cultural contexts" (p. 267). In Inner Circle countries, such as Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand, English is acquired and spoken as a first language by the majority of people (Matsuda, 2002). The Outer Circle refers to countries such as India, Kenya, the Philippines, and Singapore, which "represent the institutionalized non-native varieties (ESL) in the regions that have passed through extended periods of colonization" (Kachru, 1992, p. 356).



Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs

CC BY-NC-ND

Hanashiro, K. (2016). How globalism is represented in English textbooks in Japan. *Hawaii Pacific University TESOL Working Paper Series 14*, 2-13.

Website: <http://www.hpu.edu>.

* Email: khanashi@my.hpu.edu. Address: 5-2-20 Hiyagon Okinawa City, Okinawa, Japan. Zipcode: 904-2173

In Expanding Circle countries such as Russia, Korea, China, and Japan, “English is learned as a foreign language (EFL) and is used for international communication, such as in business, diplomacy and tourism” (Mckenzie, 2008, p. 269).

As Figure 1 and Figure 2 illustrate, the total number of English users categorized in the Outer and Expanding Circles exceeds that of the Inner Circle. This means that the number of English users is rising around the world and the number of non-native speakers of English exceeds that of native speakers. The increasing number of non-native speakers of English suggests the need to expose Japanese EFL students to many varieties of English other than the English spoken in Inner Circle countries. From this perspective, Matsuda (2003) stated, “even if one variety is selected as a dominant target model, an awareness of different varieties would help students develop a more communicative view of the English language” (p. 721). In other words, it is very important for English language learners to be aware that there are many varieties of English and to know that understanding these variations would be beneficial for international communication.

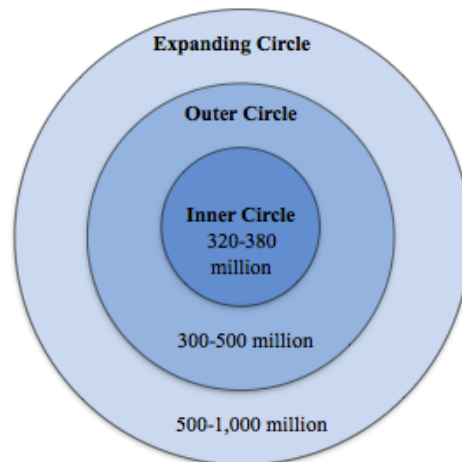


Figure 1. The Three ‘Circles’ of English (Adapted from Crystal, 2003, p. 61)

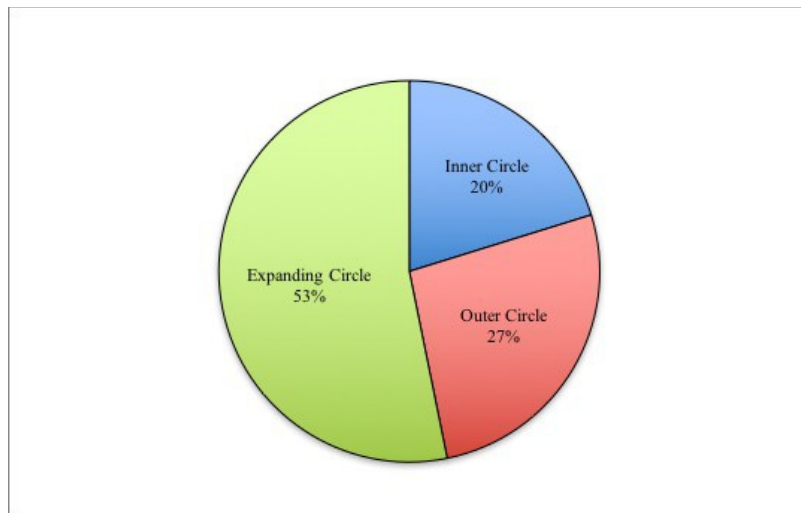


Figure 2. The Three 'Circles' of English Represented in Proportion to One Another

English in Japan

Based on Kachru's definition, Japan is categorized as an Expanding Circle country. In Japan, English does not have the status of an official language and is not used as a lingua franca. Despite many Japanese having studied English as a required subject for at least six years, from middle school to high school, in general, English proficiency among Japanese people is relatively low. According to the results of the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) reported by ETS (Education Testing Service) in 2015, Japan ranked 145th out of 172 countries and 26th out of 30 among Asian countries. Figure 2 provides a visualization of the three 'circles' of English in proportion to one another.

Due to this problem, fostering communicative competence in English is considered the most important educational goal in Japan by the central government. A new educational policy for English teaching called "The Action Plan to Cultivate 'Japanese with English Abilities'" was launched in 2003 by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (the MEXT). The main goal of this policy is to cultivate a positive attitude toward English communication and to enhance fundamental English abilities among Japanese EFL students. In accordance with this action, English lessons (called "English language activities") began in the fifth and sixth grades in 2001. As for English teaching in high schools, the recently released guidelines for English language teaching proposed by the MEXT (2009) emphasize the importance of cultural understanding for English teaching, with the goal "to develop appropriate attitude toward and basic abilities for engaging in proactive communication with people of *diverse cultural backgrounds* through the English language, while deepening understanding toward *foreign countries and cultures*" (p. 2, emphasis added). This specifically maintains that introducing global cultural elements in English teaching is one of the key goals for English language teaching. In addition, the guidelines emphasize the importance of "materials that are useful in deepening the understanding of the ways of life and cultures of Japan and *foreign countries*, raising interest in language and *culture*, and developing respectful attitudes toward these elements" (MEXT, 2009, p.

3, emphasis added). This is notable in that cross-cultural understanding has been receiving more attention and is becoming a main goal of English education in Japan.

Textbooks' Role in Establishing Learner's Perception of Language

English textbooks have a very strong impact on learners' attitudes toward language and culture because textbooks play a pivotal and immediate role in transmitting linguistic and cultural knowledge. It becomes clear how important textbooks are when one takes into account the fact that Japanese people rarely use English in social settings. In other words, most Japanese EFL learners have limited to no opportunities for exposure to English in their daily lives. Indeed, "textbooks used for teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) can be primary sources for students to obtain *cultural knowledge* and thus they may play an important role in formulating students' values and attitude toward the target culture" (Ashikaga, Fujita, and Ikuta, 2001, p. 2, emphasis added). In addition, Bardovi-Harling (1996) asserted that textbooks are vital for EFL students' input and these textbooks are the main, if not the only, sources of input in terms of a language and foreign cultures.

While the government's goal is to introduce international cultures through language studies, Japanese students seem to have a skewed perception about English varieties in the world. Focusing on the Japanese EFL learners' perception of English, Matsuda (2003) reported that "for many students, North Americans and Europeans (mainly Britons) were the two groups that came to mind when they heard the term *English Speakers*" (p. 487). This may reflect the strong influence of textbooks used in English classrooms. Therefore, "there is a need to include as wide a variety of cultural elements as possible in teaching and learning English in order for Japanese students to communicate effectively with people from other countries" (Yamanaka, 2006, p. 59). This paper aims to examine the extent to which this need is met in current English textbooks in Japan.

Research Question

The following research question was formulated in order to evaluate the representation of nations and foreign cultures in Japanese EFL textbooks: What percentage of each of the three concentric circles of English-speaking countries is represented in 11th-grade Japanese EFL textbooks?

Methodology

Three Japanese EFL textbooks (see Table 1) were selected and analyzed for this study. These textbooks were approved by the MEXT in 2013 and have been used in high schools in Japan since April 2014. I chose MEXT-approved textbooks because public schools in Japan must utilize MEXT-approved textbooks as their primary material. Thus, these textbooks dominate nationwide in English classrooms. Textbooks used in English classes have a strong impact on students' perceptions of the English language and the international cultures presented in them. In order to answer the research question, I marked every word throughout each textbook that referenced a country or culture. I excluded the exercises in my survey because many teachers

choose to skip the exercise portions of the textbooks in order to supply the students with exercises tailored to the students' levels. Such words include place names such as *France* and *Kyushu* (Japan), names of foods such as *pho* (Vietnam) and *sushi* (Japan), and people's names such as *Tutankhamen* (Egypt) and *Nelson Mandela* (South Africa). I did not include words like *English* that do not indicate or reference a specific country. In regards to photos and illustrations of people, places, objects, and animals, when a particular character appeared on a single page more than once, I counted it as one appearance. I did not count photos of generic places, objects, and animals because such things cannot be associated with a particular country. After collecting the data, I categorized the numbers according to each country and organized them using Kachru's grouping of English-speaking countries.

Table 1
List of Textbooks Surveyed

Title	Publisher
<i>Comet English Communication (Comet)</i>	Suken Shuppan
<i>All Aboard English Communication (All Aboard)</i>	Tokyo Shoseki
<i>Vista English Communication (Vista)</i>	Sanseido

Findings

Figure 3 shows the percentage of each of the three concentric circles of English-speaking countries that are represented (including Japan) in the three textbooks. The total number of words, photos, and illustrations that I marked are shown in Table 2.

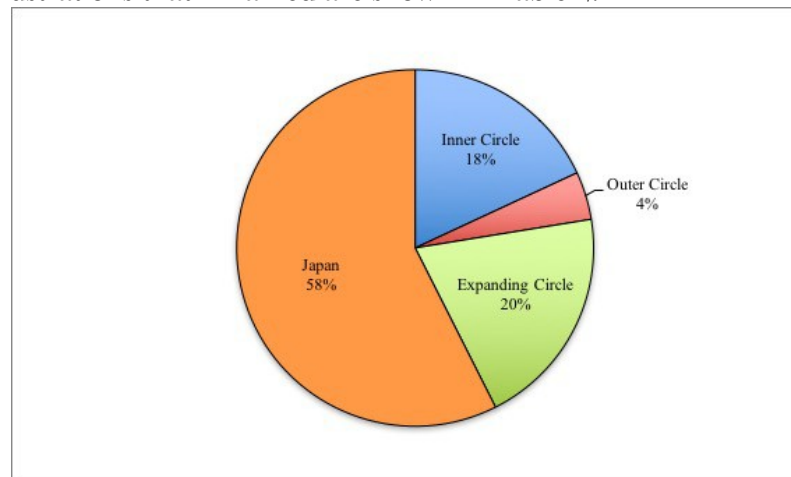


Figure 3. Representation of Countries in the Three Concentric Circles

As can be seen in Figure 3, the elements such as pictures, illustrations, and words that refer to Japan are dominant (58%). The dominant representation of Japan is a common phenomenon among these three textbooks. The second most represented circle is the Expanding Circle, which includes Korea, Vietnam, Egypt, and Turkey (20%). The third largest is the Inner

Circle, which includes the U.S, England, and Australia (18%). The percentage of the only two Outer Circle countries found in the textbooks, South Africa and Ghana, is notably low (4%). Of all Outer Circle countries, only South Africa and Ghana were represented in *Comet* (Nishimitsu et, al., 2014) and *All Aboard* (Kiyota et, al., 2014) respectively.

Table 2
Representation of Three Concentric-Circle Countries in the Textbooks

Countries	Pictures/Illustrations	Words	Total (%)
Inner Circle	33	46	79 (18%)
Outer Circle	5	14	19 (4%)
Expanding Circle	32	56	88 (20%)
Japan	90	161	251 (58%)

It is quite clear that the elements that indicate countries categorized in the Outer Circle are rarely represented in the three textbooks (there were only 5 pictures and illustrations and 14 words, making the total 19). In contrast, the numbers for the Inner Circle and Expanding Circle countries are relatively close. More specifically, the total numbers of elements referring to Inner Circle and Expanding Circle countries are 79 and 88, respectively. This suggests that even though Japanese EFL textbooks contain references associated with Inner Circle and Expanding Circle countries which Japanese EFL learners can come into contact with, the representations of the Outer Circle countries in the textbooks do not match the reality of English as a global language.

Representation of Inner Circle Countries

Figure 4 shows a closer look at the Inner Circle countries represented in these three textbooks. The representation of the USA is dominant (39%) and is nearly double that of any of the other four leading Inner Circle countries, namely England (23%), Australia (20%), Ireland (15%), and Canada (3%). The historical, political, economic, and social connections holding between Japan and the United States are reflected in the ubiquity of pictures, illustrations, and words related to the USA. It is noteworthy that nothing in reference to New Zealand was found in these three textbooks, which means Japanese students are not able to gain any information on this Inner Circle country through their textbooks.

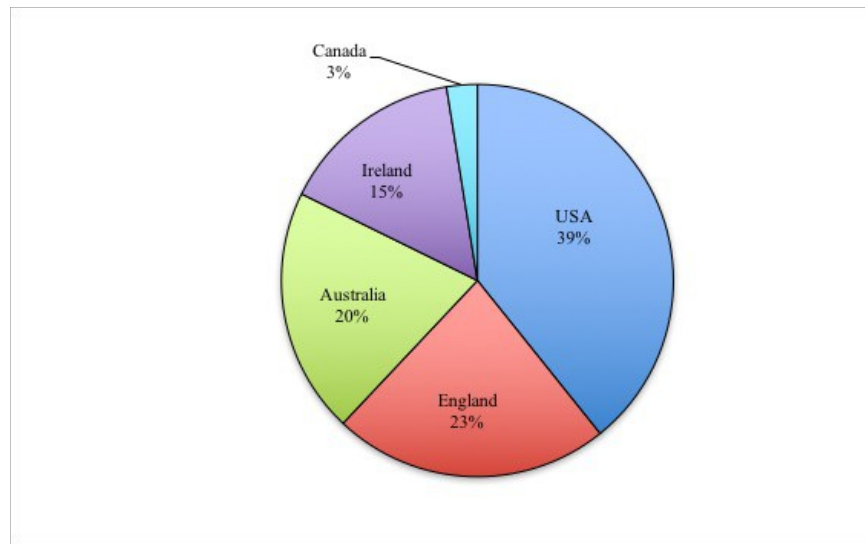


Figure 4. Representation of Countries in the Inner Circle

Table 3 shows the detailed number of references to countries in the Inner Circle in the textbooks. While the USA is represented among three textbooks, only one Inner Circle country was mentioned once in *Comet*. Although *All Aboard* contains two references to Canada, references to Canada were absent in the other two textbooks. What can be determined from the analysis of this data is that the representation of the United States among Inner Circle countries is dominant. Meanwhile, other countries are not represented with consistency within these textbooks.

Table 3

Representation of Inner Circle Countries in the Textbooks

Countries	<i>Comet</i>		<i>All Aboard</i>		<i>Vista</i>		Total (%)
	Pictures Illustrations	Words	Pictures Illustrations	Words	Pictures Illustrations	Words	
USA	2	2	8	15	4	0	31 (39%)
England	0	1	5	10	1	1	18 (23%)
Australia	0	0	7	7	2	0	16 (20%)
Ireland	0	0	0	0	4	8	12 (15%)
Canada	0	0	2	0	0	0	2 (3%)

Representation of Outer Circle Countries

The data concerning the Outer Circle countries is shown in Table 4. It is clear that the number of items associated with Outer Circle countries in these textbooks is limited. In *Comet* (Nishimitsu et, al., 2014), there are 15 total elements associated with South Africa. This is the only textbook that uses an Outer Circle country as the topic of a lesson. In *All Aboard* (Kiyota et, al., 2014),

there are only four references to Outer Circle countries (Ghana), while *Vista* (Kaneko et, al., 2014) does not contain any references to Outer Circle countries at all.

Table 4
Representation of Outer Circle Countries in the Textbooks

Textbook	Pictures/Illustrations	Words	Total
<i>Comet</i>	4	11	15 (79%)
<i>All Aboard</i>	1	3	4 (21%)
<i>Vista</i>	0	0	0 (0%)

Yamanaka's (2006) study also revealed that "the countries in the Outer Circle appear the least frequently in English textbooks." He also stated (2006), "Although many of these nations are important trading partners for Japan in the modern world... little information on these countries is available to students through English textbooks." In Yamanaka's study, the percentage of Outer Circle nations mentioned in high school textbooks was 10% (2006). Figure 3 shows that Outer Circle countries in high school textbooks used in 2014 were represented at a mere 4%. Yamanaka mentions in his research that according to MEXT guidelines "there are no detailed instructions about which nations should be included in the textbooks." In nearly 10 years since Yamanaka's research, the representation of nations in the Outer Circle has decreased in high school learning materials. While a 6% drop may not seem like much of a decrease, the fact that the representation of Outer Circle countries was already sparse is a cause for concern.

Representation of Expanding Circle Countries

As mentioned earlier, Expanding Circle countries dominate among the three concentric circles, apart from Japan, in the textbooks (20% in Figure 3). There are many different Expanding Circle countries identified throughout the textbooks, and each one can be categorized into one of the following five regions: Asia, Europe, Africa, South America, Other Regions, and Japan.

Table 5
Expanding Circle Countries Based Region

Countries	Number of times represented
Asian	31 (9%)
European	27 (8%)
African	14 (4%)
South American	10 (3%)
Other	6 (2%)
Japan	251 (74%)

Table 5 shows the striking number of items associated with Japan (251), which is approximately eight times that of Asian countries such as Turkey, Vietnam, and Korea (31). This is because the contents of each lesson in the textbooks are organized by making connections with Japanese and international cultures. That is, the textbooks compare and contrast Japanese culture with cultures of other countries. Represented the third highest is the European region, which includes Germany, France, and Italy (27). Table 6 illustrates which countries are represented in each of the three Japanese EFL textbooks surveyed (excluding Japan).

Table 6

Countries in Expanding Circle Identified in Textbooks (excluding Japan)

<i>All Aboard</i>		<i>Comet</i>		<i>Vista</i>	
France	4	China	5	Egypt	12
Netherland	2	Korea	4	Turkey	11
Côte d'Ivoire	2	Thailand	2	Vietnam	7
		Greece	2	Ecuador	6
		France	1	Germany	5
		Germany	1	Italy	5
		Spain	1	Sweden	4
		Brazil	1	Brazil	3
				Nauru	3
				Iceland	2
				Greenland	2
				China	1
				Iran	1
				Iraq	1

Comparison of Country Representation in each Textbook

The results of this study have been provided in terms of the percentage of each of the three concentric circles represented in Japanese EFL textbooks. The textbooks are then compared to clarify how each textbook differentially represents the countries of the three concentric circles. Figures 5, 6, and 7 illustrate the percentage of each of the three concentric circles represented in each of the three Japanese EFL textbook examined. The number of items associated with Japan is not included in these figures. An important fact that can be gleaned from these pie charts is that there are remarkable differences in the percentages of each circle depending on the textbook.

Although *Comet* (Nishimitsu et al., 2014) contains all three circles, the Outer and Expanding Circles are represented the most, at 41% and 46% respectively. This is compared with the representation of the Inner Circle, which is only at 13% (Figure 5). Regarding *All Aboard* (Kiyota et al., 2014), the distribution of the Inner Circle is overwhelmingly high (82%), while the other two circles are quite low: 6% for the Outer Circle and 12% for the Expanding Circle (Figure 6). Lastly, the representations of Outer Circle countries were not found in *Vista* (Figure 7)

(Kaneko et, al., 2014). In addition, the percentage of Expanding Circle countries (76%) completely outnumbers that of Inner Circle countries (24%).

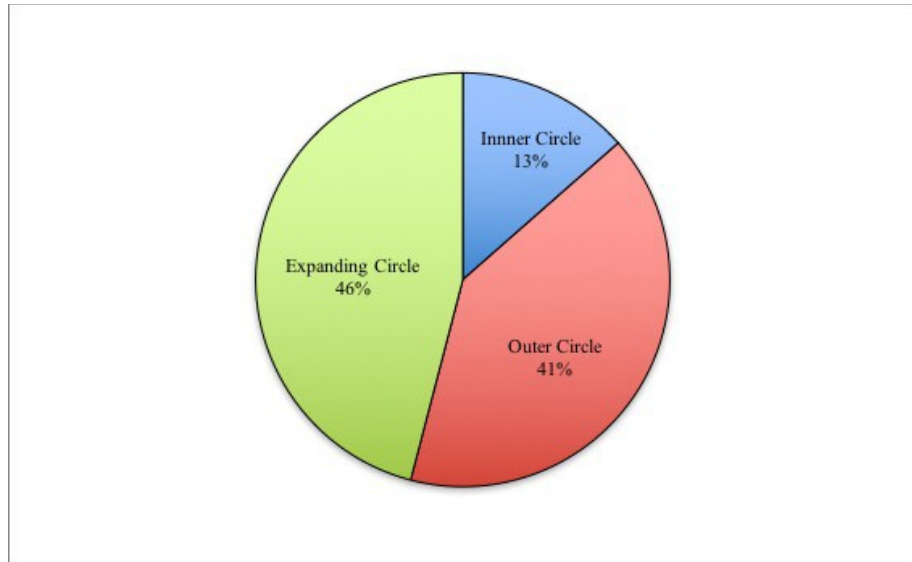


Figure 5. Representation of Countries in *Comet* by Percentage

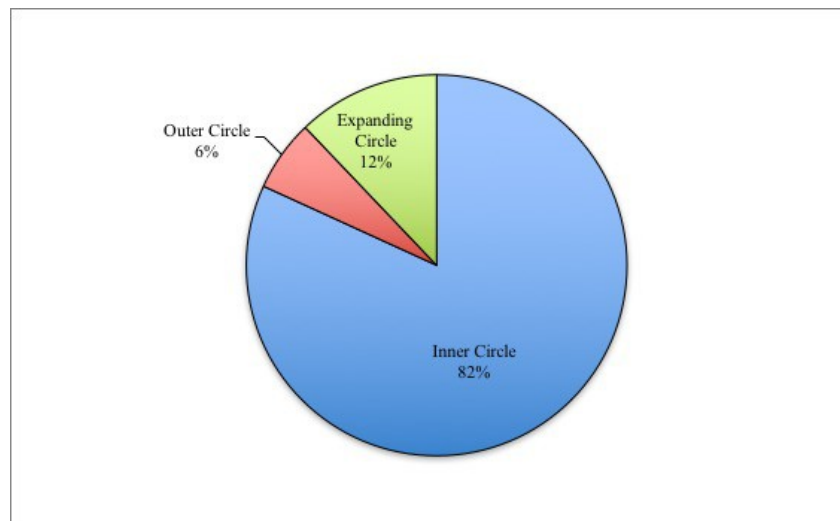


Figure 6. Representation of Countries in *All Aboard* by Percentage

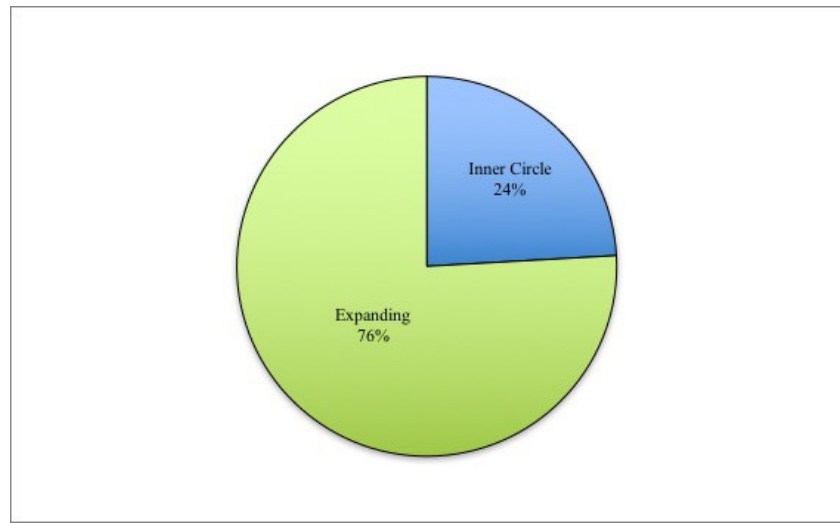


Figure 7. Representation of Countries in *Vista* by Percentage

This finding suggests that the opportunities for students to encounter information that cultivates their awareness of varieties of English and international cultures depends crucially on which textbook is chosen and used in their English classroom.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, three Japanese EFL textbooks used in 11th-grade classrooms were analyzed. The findings revealed that these three textbooks are likely to emphasize both Expanding and Inner circle countries by using items which refer to countries within these two circles, whereas the distribution for Outer Circle countries is noticeably low. In addition, this limited representation of the Outer Circle can result in students mistakenly believing that English speakers from the Outer Circle play only a peripheral role in the English language (Matsuda, 2002, p. 190).

This study also revealed that the United States is dominantly represented within Inner Circle countries, whereas the representation of elements associated with Canada is quite low (3%). Moreover, there were no references to New Zealand in the three Japanese EFL textbooks. This extensive representation of the United States is likely an influencing factor in Japanese EFL learners' perception of English as being an "American" language. McKenzie and Gilmore (2015) insisted that one of the main reasons for this perception of English comes from "greater levels of exposure amongst Japanese students to L1 form of English at all levels of the Japanese educational systems" (p. 13) including textbooks.

Regarding Outer Circle countries, only two countries were identified through the textbooks and the number of items was relatively low. A similar result emerged from Yamanaka's study ten years ago, (2006) in which the percentage of representation of Outer Circle countries is low. Yamanaka (2006) advocated that, "it would be better if more information on these Outer Circle countries were provided in the textbooks" (p. 70) to make students aware of the existence of diversity in English, which could enhance their communicative view of English.

Regarding the Expanding Circle, there were two major regions in this circle: Asia and Europe. The total number of these two regions is nearly double the total number of the other

regions, excluding Japan. In order to broaden students' awareness of countries in which other, lesser known varieties of English are spoken, more attention should be given to countries within the Expanding Circle.

Students' perspective on where and how English is used around the world and the cultures involved will depend on which English textbook is used in the classroom. English teachers in Japan need to pay special attention to how English is represented in the textbooks available for classroom use. This is because "if we wish to empower English language learners (ESLs) and help them overcome the native-speakers bias, we need to ensure that teachers who work directly with them are respectful and accepting of the linguistic and functional diversity that exists in English today" (Ates, Eslami, and Wright, 2015, p. 486).

Certain changes to English textbooks in Japan should be implemented in order to increase the role of Outer and Expanding Circle varieties of English. This could involve the use of more characters from such countries, which would help students understand the role of English as a lingua franca in international settings (Matsuda, 2002).

A question for future consideration is how students' perception of English can change based on the textbook used in class along with the use of supplemental learning materials such as YouTube videos, magazines, literature excerpts, and newspaper articles. As an English language teacher in Japan, I will have the opportunity to experiment and witness the results firsthand among Japanese EFL students.

References

- Ashikaga, T., Fujita, R., & Ikuta, Y. (2001). A study of cultural aspects in Japanese EFL communication textbooks. *JACET Bulletin*, 33, 1-10.
- Ates, B., Eslami, Z. R., & Wright, K. L. (2015). Incorporating world Englishes into undergraduate ESL education courses. *World Englishes*, 34(3), 485-501.
- Bardovi-Harlig, K. (1996). Pragmatics and language teaching: Bringing pragmatics and pedagogy together. *Pragmatics and Language Learning*, 7, 21-39.
- David, C. (1997). *English as a global language*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. Print.
- Educational Testing Service (2015). Test and score data summary for TOEFL iBT tests. https://www.ets.org/s/toefl/pdf/94227_unlweb.pdf#search='TOEFL+ranking'
- Kachru, B. B. (1992). Teaching world Englishes. *The other tongue: English across cultures*, 2, 355-366. Urbana, Illinois. University of Illinois press.
- Kaneko, T., Ikeda, S., Fukuda, M., Nukui, H., Maybin, D., Ishizuka, M., et al., (2014). *Vista: English communication II*. Tokyo, Japan: Sanseido.
- Kiyota, Y., Asaoka, C., Kawano, K., Kinouchi, M., Tsuruta, K., Nakano, T., et al., (2014) *All aboard: English communication II*. Tokyo, Japan: Tokyo Shoseki
- Matsuda, A. (2002). Representation of users and uses of English in beginning Japanese EFL textbooks. *JALT Journal*, 24(2), 182-200.
- Matsuda, A. (2003). Incorporating world Englishes in teaching English as an international language. *Tesol Quarterly*, 37(4), 719-729.
- Matsuda, A. (2003). The ownership of English in Japanese secondary schools. *World Englishes*, 22(4), 483-496.

- McKenzie, R. M., & Gilmore, A. (2015). "The people who are out of 'right' English": Japanese university students' social evaluations of English language diversity and the internationalisation of Japanese higher education. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*.
- Mckenzie, R. M. (2008). The complex and rapidly changing sociolinguistic position of the English language in Japan: A summary of English language contact and use. In *Japan Forum* (Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 267-286). Taylor & Francis Group.
- MEXT (2005). Overview of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.
http://www.mext.go.jp/component/english/_icsFiles/afieldfile/2016/03/22/1303074_01.pdf
- Nishimitsu, Y., Ikeno, O., Ishikawa, S., Murata, K., Campana, R.M., Isobe, T., et al., (2014) *Comet: English communication II*. Tokyo, Japan: Suken Shuppan.
- Yamanaka, N. (2006). An evaluation of English textbooks in Japan from the viewpoint of nations in the inner, outer, and expanding circles. *JALT journal*, 28(1), 5

About the author:

Kazushige Hanashiro graduated from Hawaii Pacific University with a MA in TESOL and has been teaching English in Okinawa, Japan since 2001. Currently, he teaches English at Awase Special Needs School in Okinawa. His focus is developing English communicative competence for students by applying TESOL theories and techniques in the classroom.