



DOI: 10.2478/jolace-2024-0013

How do EFL textbooks evaluate countries? Discursive and production perspectives

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Abstract

This article examines evaluations of entities associated with countries in English language textbooks for junior high school students in Japan. Drawing on an APPRAISAL analysis and interviews, the study explores how evaluations of national entities are realized in the textbooks. Eighteen textbooks were analyzed, and three interviews were conducted, one with a textbook writer and two with textbook editors. The findings reveal that the English language textbooks evaluated entities associated with Japan in a positive light much more frequently than those related to other countries. This was realized by the writer and editors' intention that the textbooks be used to teach aspects of Japanese culture and to nurture learners' diverse perspectives toward countries and their cultures.

Key words: language textbooks, evaluations, appraisal, critical discourse analysis

1 Introduction

There has been a growing academic interest in language textbooks in recent years as these resources have evolved beyond merely conveying linguistic knowledge and skills. Language textbooks increasingly aim to influence learners' assumptions and perceptions, particularly regarding diverse cultures, thereby serving as instruments of cultural education and intercultural awareness. Teaching cultural aspects in applied linguistics has been a sensitive topic since culture can have ideological and political attributes. The current approach to culture in language teaching is a "transnational or global/local approach, focusing on cultural complexity and hybridity" (Risager, 2011, p.485). This suggests that language teachers should be aware of cultural diversity when teaching a language. At the same time, it is essential to prevent language learners from developing stereotypical perceptions of a culture. In language textbooks, however, the representation of cultures tends to be more fixed than dynamic (e.g., Canale, 2016; Chun, 2016; McConachy & Hata, 2013; Weningner & Kiss, 2013). Canale (2016) conducted review research focusing on nine studies on the representation of cultures in textbooks for different languages, including English and Swahili. She concludes that, in terms of their approach to cultures, "textbooks do not seem to favour criticality and reflection" (Canale, 2016, p.240). Weningner and Kiss (2013) also found that cultural aspects in English language textbooks produced in Hungary are presented in a denotative manner. They argue that this results in learners lacking awareness of diverse features of cultures. Similarly, it has been found that English language textbooks published in Japan present stereotyped views on national cultures such as those of the United States and Japan (McConachy & Hata, 2013).

Currently, scholars in applied linguistics are increasingly focusing on the multimodal features of language textbooks and their relationship to cultural representation. For example, Zhang & Cuo (2022) conducted a multimodal analysis of Chinese language textbooks for Tibetan ethnic students in the Tibet Autonomous Region of mainland China. It was found that Tibet is depicted in a positive light in the textbooks. The image of Tibet, however, is presented as primitive and backward. This representation of Tibet's marginalization fosters a need for a unified national identity in China (Zhang & Cuo, 2022). Since language textbooks often play an essential role in shaping perceptions and understanding of language and culture, Weningner (2020) argues that research on language textbooks should identify how multimodal textbook resources attempt to engage learners.

In terms of the representation of race and ethnicity, previous research suggests that language textbooks are often unbalanced and stereotyped. In Bowen and Hopper's (2022) study on the representation of race in five popular English language textbooks, whites are not only dominant quantitatively. Still, they are also represented as advanced through visual resources such as close-up shots and image positioning. Xiang and Yeneika-Agbaw (2021) investigated how ethnicity is represented in EFL textbooks for ethnic Mongols in China. Most of the people who appear in the textbooks are from Inner Circle countries, as defined by Kachru and Nelson (1996), and China. This, Xiang and Yeneika-Agbaw (2021) argue, is likely to lead to learners' limited understanding of multicultural communication in English. In other studies of cultural representations in language textbooks, cultural identities are

also found to be biased. Chinese language textbooks used nationwide in China promote patriotism and the collective spirit (Liu, 2005). In Korean EFL textbooks, white male individuals dominantly appeared. This may result in learners developing biased views towards the cultures represented (Song, 2013).

1.1 Research on the representation of national cultures in language textbooks

A growing body of literature recognizes problems in the representation of cultures in language textbooks. One of the issues identified is the portrayal of national and ethnic cultures as static and homogeneous. Another problematic feature identified is the tendency of language textbooks to promote patriotism while perpetuating racial and gender inequality. Uzum et al. (2021) and Sun and Kwon (2019) found that language textbooks for the Arabic, French, German, Chinese and Korean languages present features of national and regional cultures as unvarying. This is also the case in Russian language textbooks. These textbooks inadequately represent the diverse nature of present-day Russian society by oversimplifying regional identities (Shardakova & Pavlenko, 2004). Similarly, Lee and Wang (2023) found that Chinese language textbooks attempt to strengthen a Chinese identity by describing Chinese people's agony due to foreign invaders. This promotes a sense of patriotism, sacrifice, and vigilance against foreign threats. It can be seen from Ou's (2008) research how language textbooks are influenced by political power. The study examined Chinese junior high school textbooks published between 1970 and 2004. During the 1990s, as Taiwanese political leaders began advocating for Taiwan and China to be distinct entities, textbooks in Taiwan underwent a shift in focus. They began emphasizing the state-to-state relationship between Taiwan and China and promoting the construction of a Taiwanese identity.

Several studies have been conducted to analyze EFL textbooks used in Japanese schools. Yamada (2011), for example, conducted a content analysis of EFL textbooks used in Japanese junior high schools to examine the portrayal of races and ethnicities in textbooks published between 1987 and 2002. Textbooks lacked representation of various ethnicities in older versions of the textbooks. Textbooks published in 2002 include a diverse range of ethnicities to ensure representation. The textbooks, however, lack adequate representation of racial characteristics, resulting in superficial content. In Davidson and Liu's (2018) research on cultural representation in Japanese elementary school EFL textbooks, a significant presence of Japanese cultures was revealed in the textbooks. The representation of other national cultures was overly simplistic; after interviewing learners and teachers who used the textbooks, Davidson and Liu (2018) concluded that the imbalanced and superficial representation of cultures in textbooks hinders the development of a global-citizen mindset among learners.

1.2 EFL textbooks and language teaching in school education in Japan

Primary and secondary schools in Japan must use textbooks produced by private publishers and approved by the Textbook Examination Committee in the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT). The MEXT establishes the school curriculum by issuing a Course of Study. To put concepts in the Course of Study into practice, MEXT-approved textbooks are published and used in schools in Japan. Once the Textbook Authorization Council examines draft textbooks to assess their suitability for use, the MEXT decides to approve the proposed textbooks, considering the council's recommendation. The publishers assemble an editorial committee comprising university professors, schoolteachers, and administrators. These committees are responsible for reviewing prospective textbooks. The MEXT mandates a stringent textbook examination process to ensure their quality and appropriateness. If the council does not approve a textbook draft, the publisher must make necessary corrections and resubmit the revised version for examination. Additionally, senior content specialists may request further corrections or improvements before approving the textbook (Tani et al., 1993).

After textbooks are approved by MEXT, the board of education in each region in Japan decides which MEXT-approved textbooks to use at elementary and secondary schools in the area. High schools can select MEXT-approved textbooks as they have specific educational focuses and courses, such as agriculture. This allows high schools to align their curriculum with their specialized areas of study and educational objectives.

The secondary school teaching guide for the Course of Study for foreign languages produced by MEXT (2017) discusses how knowledge and attitudes towards Japanese and other cultures should be taught. It emphasizes learners' understanding of the cultural background of language use, cultural diversity, and learners' interest in Japanese and different cultures. The guide, for example, states that English language classes should promote learners' interest in Japanese and other cultures and deepen their understanding of the cultures.

This article sets out to explore the following research questions:

- 1) Which evaluative features are used to evaluate countries in Japan's MEXT-approved English language textbooks for Junior high schools?
- 2) How did a material writer and editor produce the textbooks regarding evaluations of countries?

2 Methodology

The research employed text analysis and interview approaches to identify how national entities are evaluated in EFL textbooks in Japan. The two approaches are appropriate for revealing how the evaluations of national cultures are represented in the textbooks and the reasons for those evaluations from textbook producers' perspectives. Previous studies on the cultural, racial and ethnic representations in language textbooks fail to provide information on the production process of the representations since those studies only present the findings of discursive and content analyses.

The study was conducted according to the ethical guidelines for research projects at Musashino University (permission number: R3-006). All participation took place with informed consent.

2.1 Data collection

The research investigated the evaluations of national cultures in all six MEXT-approved EFL textbooks for junior high schools in Japan published in 2021, namely, New Horizon (Tokyo Shoseki), Sunshine (Kairyudo), One World (Kyoiku Shuppan), New Crown (Sanseido), Blue Sky (Keirinkan), and Here We Go! (Mitsumura Toshio). There are three school years in Japanese junior high schools. Each textbook series consists of three volumes, with one designated for each junior high school year. In total, 18 textbooks were examined in the study. The author also conducted semi-structured interviews with one material writer and three editors from two publishers to examine textbook producers' intentions regarding national entities' evaluations. The four individuals were interviewed to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the topics explored in the article.

2.2 Data analysis

The study conducted a discourse analysis of texts in the MEXT-approved EFL textbooks and a content analysis of the interviews with the writer and editors. The evaluations of national cultures in the textbooks were analyzed using the APPRAISAL framework Martin and White (2005) developed as a tool.

The APPRAISAL system comprises three sub-systems: ATTITUDE, ENGAGEMENT, and GRADUATION. In this study, the analysis focused on ATTITUDE and GRADUATION. ATTITUDE is dedicated to evaluations, which can be categorized into three areas: 'AFFECT,' which conveys emotions; 'JUDGEMENT,' which centres around people; and 'APPRECIATION,' which expresses the values attributed to things. JUDGEMENT, by evaluating people's personality and morality, can be divided into 'social esteem' (personality) and 'social sanction' (morality).

The process of GRADUATION allows the message within the text to be intensified or softened, sharpened or blurred. Increasing or decreasing the intensity of the message involves modifying its 'force'. On the other hand, adjusting the sharpness or blurriness of the message consists in modifying its 'focus'.

The interviews with the textbook writer and editors were analyzed in terms of content. Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) explain the analysis of interview data through various techniques, including condensation and coding meanings. To maintain the reliability of the interview data, the interviews were transcribed. To enhance the validity of the analysis, the study incorporated additional questions during the interviews to seek clarification on the comments provided by the interviewees. The study employs the framework analysis Braun & Clarke (2006) developed to analyze the interview data. The analysis follows six analytic stages: familiarization, the generation of codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. In the familiarization phase, the interview data were transcribed. This was followed by the stage of coding, during which each passage was assigned a label, such as an example of topics in the textbook and the writer's aim. Then, based on the labels, themes were developed. Each theme was then reviewed and named. The themes can be categorized into three main groups: "policy regarding teaching about cultures," "examples of teaching about cultures," and "policy regarding English language teaching."

3 Results

This section is two-fold. First, the findings of the APPRAISAL analysis are presented and analyzed. Then, the results of the interviews are evaluated.

3.1 Results of an APPRAISAL analysis

This section demonstrates the evaluation of countries, their people, and objects in EFL textbooks for junior high schools in Japan. It utilizes an APPRAISAL framework (Martin & White, 2005) to examine the evaluations. Firstly, it identifies the countries, their people, and their objects subjected to assessment. Subsequently, it compares national evaluations regarding APPRECIATION, JUDGEMENT, AFFECT, and GRADUATION.

3.2 Which countries are evaluated?

It was found that the textbooks assessed 24 countries by examining individuals, objects, historical events, and geographical locations associated with them. As can be seen from Table 1, 60.3% of assessments pertain to the

individuals and objects of Japan. Most of the evaluations are positive (e.g., “some kawaii culture is now popular in foreign countries, too.” on p.84, New Horizon 3). Out of all the evaluations concerning individuals and objects, only 12 of them are negative in relation to Japan. This can be exemplified in the statement, “I don’t like natto (fermented soybeans)” on p.38 in Blue Sky 1. Evaluations toward entities related to English speaking countries, such as Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, and the United States of America, receive evaluations in the textbooks. They amount to 21.2% (63 instances). A sizable portion of the evaluations regarding individuals and objects are positive in relation to individuals and objects associated with those countries (e.g., “Edinburgh is a great place” on p.75 in New Crown 1). There are only a few instances of negative evaluations (e.g., “terrible time in American history” on p.70 in New Crown 3). Individuals and objects related to non-English speaking countries have 59 examples of APPRAISAL (18.5%) in the textbooks. The countries include Bangladesh, Bolivia, Sri Lanka, China, Finland, Germany, India, Italy, Kenya, Korea, Mongolian state, Nepal, Pakistan, Rwanda, Singapore, Spain, Sudan, Thailand, the Philippines. Similarly, most of the evaluations are positive (e.g., “Chinese is used as a first language by the greatest number of people” on p.4 in New Horizon 3). Only four examples of negative APPRAISAL were found (e.g., “It (savanna) is a dangerous place” on p.73 in Sunshine 1).

Table 1. Numbers of evaluation instances by country type

	Positive evaluations	Negative evaluations	Total
Japan	167	12	179 (60.3%)
English speaking countries	59	4	63 (21.2%)
Non-English speaking countries	50	4	55 (18.5%)
			297 (100%)

3.3 Results of an APPRECIATION analysis

In the textbooks, there are 181 occurrences in which non-human entities were evaluated. Among them, 107 (59.7%) involved objects connected to Japan, showing a significant APPRECIATION towards them. Non-human entities connected to English-speaking countries are evaluated 45 times (24.9%) in the textbooks. The textbooks featured 29 evaluations (16%) focused on non-human entities associated with non-English speaking countries. As described in Table 2, most APPRECIATION instances are positive.

The popularity, beauty, and fame of cultural artefacts and places such as Haiku, sushi and Mt. Fuji are often described when evaluating non-human entities related to Japan. This can be exemplified in the instance, “karate is as popular as wearing a kimono” on p.79 in New Crown 2, and “these houses in Shirakawago are beautiful” on p.70 in Sunshine 2. More than half of the instances were related to objects associated with English-speaking countries (77 cases), specifically about the United States of America. As with APPRECIATION toward Japanese entities, cultures and places such as Central Park and the song “Stand by Me” are frequently described in terms of their popularity and beauty, as in the example, “New York is amazing” on p.56 in Here We Go 2. APPRECIATION instances are also toward Australia (e.g., “Uluru is a famous place in Australia” on p.56 in New Crown 2) and the United Kingdom (e.g., “beautiful Lake District” on p.10 in New Crown 2). Similar APPRAISAL patterns can be observed for entities associated with non-English speaking countries such as China and India. They appear 22 times across the textbooks (e.g., “Curry became popular” on p.26 in New Horizon 2).

It is worth noting that there are negative APPRECIATION instances in the textbooks. Japanese language and cultural aspects are described negatively 10 times across the textbooks. There are, for example, three negative evaluations toward the Japanese language (e.g., “Japanese is not easy” on p.51 in New Crown 1). For English-speaking countries and non-English-speaking countries, negative APPRECIATION concerns safety, political instability, and history (e.g., “terrible time in American history” on p.70 in New Crown 3).

Table 2. Numbers of APPRECIATION examples by country type

	Positive evaluations	Negative evaluations	Total
Japan	97	10	107 (59.1%)
English speaking countries	43	2	45 (24.9%)
Non-English speaking countries	26	3	29 (16%)
			181 (100%)

3.4 Results of a JUDGEMENT analysis

Throughout the textbooks, 37 instances of JUDGEMENT are found. Table 3 shows that many of these instances fall under the category of social esteem, with only three cases classified as negative JUDGEMENT within the social

sanction sub-type. Among the JUDGEMENT instances, approximately 32.5% of the social esteem cases are directed towards individuals associated with Japan, including novelists, sports players, and scientists (e.g., “She (Naomi Osaka) is a great tennis player (explanation added by the author)” on p.47 in *One World 1*). On the other hand, there are three instances of social sanction targeting Japanese individuals, including a historical figure and an animated character, as in the example, “he (John Mung) was a very polite, kind, and eager student (explanation added by the author)” on p.115 in *One World 3*. Individuals associated with English-speaking countries are appraised positively in all but two of the 12 instances. One social sanction example is “they (African Americans) fought in a peaceful way (explanation added by the author)” on p.74 in *New Crown 3*. There were two cases of negative social esteem, one directed towards Audrey Hepburn (e.g., “Hepburn’s life was complicated” on p.43 in *One World 3*). In 10 instances, individuals associated with non-English speaking countries are also generally evaluated positively. This can be exemplified by a specific case of social esteem, “Gandhi is a man who has influenced a lot of people” on p.77 in *New Horizon 3*, and an instance of social sanction, “He (Gandhi) never used violence (explanation added by the author)” on p.80 in *New Horizon 3*.

Table 3. Numbers of JUDGEMENT instances by country type

	JUDGEMENT sub-types	Positive evaluations	Negative Evaluations	Total
Japan	Social esteem	12	0	12 (32.5%)
	Social sanction	3	0	3 (8.1%)
English speaking countries	Social esteem	7	2	9 (24.3%)
	Social sanction	3	0	3(8.1%)
Non-English speaking countries	Social esteem	5	1	6 (16.2%)
	Social sanction	4	0	4 (10.8%)
				37 (100%)

3.5 Results of an AFFECT analysis

An AFFECT analysis shows that there are 66 AFFECT cases across the textbooks. As shown in Table 4, 49 instances (74.2%) are specifically targeted toward entities linked to Japan, such as Japanese food, manga and hot springs. Most of these 49 cases consist of positive emotions, indicated by words such as “like” and “love”. These two verbs appear frequently in the textbooks, such as “I like Japanese food” on p.13 in *New Horizon 1* and “I love Japanese castles” on p.5 in *One World 2*. There are six instances in which emotions are expressed toward entities associated with English-speaking countries, namely New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia. Among the six cases, four instances express positive emotions toward objects related to English-speaking countries, as in “I enjoyed the story of Peter Rabbit” on p.10 in *New Crown 2*, for objects related to non-English speaking countries such as China and India, 11 AFFECT instances appear. Similar to the cases of AFFECT directed toward entities associated with Japan and English-speaking countries, most cases convey positive emotions and personal preferences through terms like ‘like’ and ‘love’. This can be exemplified in a case, “He really loves the beautiful sea life (in the Philippines) (explanation added by the author)” on p. 60 in *New Horizon 1*.

Table 4. Numbers of AFFECT instances by country type

	Positive evaluations	Negative evaluations	Total
Japan	44	5	49 (74.2%)
English speaking countries	5	1	6 (9.1%)
Non-English speaking countries	9	2	11 (16.7%)
			66 (100%)

3.6 Results of a GRADUATION analysis

It was found that the textbooks use 54 GRADUATION instances. As seen in Table 5, there were 36 GRADUATION instances that evaluated individuals and entities associated with Japan (66.6% of the total). The GRADUATION instances regarding Japan can be grouped into three types: those using comparatives/ superlatives such as “more” and “the most”; those using intensifying words, such as “quite” and “very”; and those using a combination of GRADUATION and AFFECT, as in the example “I like ramen very much. “In the case of the comparative/ superlative instances, the evaluations of entities are often compared to those of the past (e.g., more popular day by day) or another object (e.g., Mt. Fuji is more beautiful than Mt. Everest). APPRECIATION and JUDGEMENT examples are also intensified by GRADUATION items 16 times across the textbooks. With this type of GRADUATION, APPRECIATION

meanings are intensified, as in the examples “so delicious” and “very popular.” When GRADUATION and AFFECT instances occur together, they are always with the mental process of “like” and a GRADUATION, as in the example, “very much.” For evaluations of entities and individuals related to English-speaking countries, GRADUATION items occur 11 times. The instances can be divided into a comparative/ superlative type (e.g., “the best song”) and an intensification type (e.g., “very special”). The comparative/ superlative and intensification types of GRADUATION also appear in evaluations toward individuals and entities associated with non-English speaking countries, namely China, India, Italy, the Philippines and Finland (e.g., “He really likes Cebu”).

Table 5. numbers of GRADUATION instances by country type

Japan	English speaking countries	Non-English speaking countries	Total
36 (66.6%)	11 (20.4%)	7 (13%)	54 (100%)

3.7 Results of an interview analysis

Three semi-structured interviews were conducted as part of the study: one with a textbook writer, one with two editors and one with a single editor. The editors were from two publishing companies of MEXT-approved textbooks. The length of the interviews ranged from 30 to 40 minutes. Table 6 provides data for each interview conducted in the research,

Table 6. Summary of interviews

Interview number	Interviewees
1	Editors A, B
2	Editor C
3	Writer A

3.7.1 Policies regarding teaching about cultures

In the interviews, the editors and writer presented their views and policies regarding teaching about cultures. They are related to the Course of Study published by MEXT, choices of cultural topics, and their expectations of what should be learned through the textbooks.

It was found that the editors regard the Course of Study as guiding material for their textbooks regarding teaching about cultures. This is exemplified in the statement: “*Our textbooks are certified according to the content of the Course of Study. This is why the content of the Course of Study is reflected in our textbooks* (translated to English by the author)” (1-6A). Another editor said: “*The Course of Study is very influential* (translated to English by the author)” (2-15). Regarding Japanese culture, one editor said: “*We are supposed to have topics on Japan based on the Course of Study* (translated to English by the author)” (2-2). In the statement of another editor, “*according to the Course of Study, we need to have topics that learners can have an understanding of diverse values and have interests in cultures related to English language and Japan* (translated to English by the author)” (1-7A).

The editors and writers state that they made their textbooks, hoping learners can develop multiple perspectives toward cultural topics. They hoped that the textbooks would offer the students opportunities to think about the differences between national cultures and dispel any stereotypical understanding of culture they may have. One editor said that “*by learning different cultures and the positive and negative aspects of Japanese culture, we hope that learners will obtain diverse perspectives and ways of thinking towards cultures* (translated to English by the author)” (1-30B). From the writer’s point of view, “*it was important for us to make sure that stereotypical understanding of a culture is not represented in the textbook* (translated to English by the author)” (3-23).

It is worth noting that the writer talked about Japanese learners’ self-respect and self-affirmation. He said that “*all editors and writers agreed in the meeting that the content of the textbook should increase Japanese learners’ self-respect and self-affirmation* (translated to English by the author)” (3-3). For example, “*we can use Japanese who are recognized internationally* (translated to English by the author)” (3-4).

3.7.2 Examples of teaching about cultures

The choice of topics regarding national cultures was found to be a key aspect of writing and editing textbooks. Fundamentally, the topics a textbook contains are significant factors in a textbook being adopted or not. Moreover, topics should be accessible to junior high school students. One editor said that “*cultural topics that teachers highly evaluate are those with which their students are familiar* (translated to English by the author)” (2-25). Another editor stated that “*we employ daily-life topics in the junior high school first-year textbook and social topics in the second- and third-year textbooks* (translated to English by the author)” (2-27A). In the interview with the writer, it was

mentioned that “we wanted to give learners an opportunity to learn about the deep culture of a topic, but that would be too difficult for junior high school students. So, we needed to keep the content the surface-culture level (translated to English by the author)” (3-25).

3.7.3 Policies regarding English language teaching

The study’s interviewees underlined the textbooks’ importance in facilitating output and interaction practice. The writer, for example, stated that “we designed our textbook to help learners to think about a cultural topic and discuss it with other learners (translated to English by the author)” (3-51). One editor mentioned that “in our textbook, learners should be able to express their opinions by exploring a topic (translated to English by the author)” (2-33).

4 Discussion

The APPRAISAL analysis of EFL textbooks for junior high school students in Japan exhibits an imbalance of cultural evaluations. In these textbooks, each country is regarded as having a specific culture. Byram (2021) points out that each country can be a basic unit of culture, while other distinctions, such as geographical entities and ethnic groups, are more relevant in some situations. Entities associated with Japan are found to be positively evaluated much more frequently than those related to other countries. It is worth discussing the causes of the imbalanced evaluations and the potential effects on language learners. Previous studies show EFL textbooks represent the national culture of the country in which the textbooks are more than the cultures of other countries (see, e.g., Uzum et al., 2021 and Sun Kwon, 2019), and this is the case in Japan too: the EFL textbooks in Japan put an emphasis on Japanese people and cultures. This results in frequent occurrences of positive evaluations of Japanese culture. In the study, this is especially the case with the use of APPRECIATION and evaluations toward non-human entities.

59.1 % of APPRECIATION items are related to entities associated with Japan, with only 10 examples of negative evaluations. As Lee and Wang (2023) argue that Chinese-language textbooks construct a national identity, the textbooks in the present study do not merely teach English language but function to promote Japanese culture. This is supported by a statement by an editor in one of the interviews: “We are supposed to have topics on Japan based on the Course of Study (translated to English by the author)”. The Course of Study (MEXT, 2017) states that English classes “should help learners develop their interest in Japanese culture and the culture behind the English language, and deepen their understanding of these cultures (translated by the author)” (p.99). The Course of Study, however, also indicates that “Through learning English language, it is necessary for students to become more interested in differences in people’s lives and customs, and pay attention to cultural diversity (translated by the author)” (p.98). In the interview as shown above, an editor of the textbook says: “We hope that learners will obtain diverse perspectives and ways of thinking towards cultures.” Significant effort is required to raise learners’ awareness of Japanese culture and cultural diversity. From the research analysis, however, positive evaluations are directed toward entities associated with Japan. This may hinder learners’ development of a sense of cultural diversity. Byram (2021) argues that critical cultural awareness is one of the central elements of intercultural communication competence. This is achieved by learners’ attitudes towards questioning their values and ways of thinking, which have been shaped in a specific culture. In the textbooks examined in the study, learners should have more opportunities to examine entities associated with Japan critically.

A close look at the use of APPRAISAL resources in the textbooks merits discussion as evaluations of entities associated with specific nations may construct learners’ understanding of those nations and their attributes. With APPRECIATION instances, Japanese cultures and places are often evaluated positively. The quality and popularity of entities related to Japan are frequently praised. This tendency is more evident in the use of AFFECT, with 44 examples of positive evaluations towards entities associated with Japan. In the AFFECT use, it is worth noting that the sensors of the AFFECT instances, such as ‘like’ and ‘love’, are often not Japanese. They are instead American, Korean, Singaporean or non-specific foreigners, as in the example “young people around the world.” It seems that positive evaluations toward entities related to Japan are strengthened by voices outside of Japan. These APPRECIATION and AFFECT examples are emphasized by GRADUATION resources such as ‘most’, ‘so’ and ‘very much’. For instance, in New Crown 2, there is the sentence, “They think Japanese writing is the most beautiful (emphasis added by the author) (p.79)”. AFFECT instances which positively assess entities associated with Japan are accompanied by GRADUATION instances six times, as in “I like ramen very much (emphasis added by the author) (p.42)”. This use of GRADUATION resources may promote learners’ biased evaluations of Japanese culture.

Regarding JUDGEMENT, evaluations towards people associated with different countries are better balanced than those of the other APPRAISAL resources used in the textbooks. When the textbooks appraise people related to Japan, the evaluations are mainly towards historical people, but also a few living people, such as the baseball player Shohei Otani. As the editors and writer stated in the interview, textbook topics must be related to target learners’ interests and knowledge. In JUDGEMENT instances towards people associated with English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries, the target entities are general, as in ‘people in Alaska’, or historical people such as Thomas

Edison and Mahatma Gandhi. It is worth noting that the textbooks do not evaluate present-day people in English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries. This can be explained by the textbook producers' intentions that the content of the textbooks should pertain to other school subjects, such as history.

The last part of this section offers pedagogical suggestions from the study findings. For prospective textbooks in Japan, the assertiveness and balance of evaluations toward entities associated with Japan should be adjusted. The assertiveness, as in the example, "*people around the world love Japanese manga*," can hinder the development of learners' critical cultural awareness. Learners should be able to examine entities related to countries critically. Language teachers are also responsible for enhancing learners' critical cultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence. They should help their learners examine national cultural entities from multiple perspectives in school language textbooks. This can be done by helping learners consider both advantages and areas for improvement of national cultural entities. Without such an approach, it is unlikely that learners will have the critical cultural awareness required to develop their intercultural communicative competence. Byram (2021) argues that vital cultural awareness is the key to developing intercultural communicative competence.

5 Conclusions

The study revealed that EFL textbooks for junior high school students in Japan praised entities such as cultures, places and individuals associated with Japan more frequently than entities related to other countries. This is especially the case with positive APPRECIATION toward non-human entities. This evaluation is often realized in the textbooks by AFFECT resources, such as individuals' feelings and assessments. When AFFECT instances occur, they are usually strengthened by GRADUATION resources. Regarding JUDGEMENT instances, positive evaluations are better balanced than the other APPRAISAL resources.

It was found in the interviews with the writer and the editors that the imbalanced evaluations in the textbooks might have been constructed due to the influence of the Course of Study and the writer's and editors' intentions. At the same time, however, the writer, editors, and the Course of Study would like learners to obtain multicultural perspectives through learning the English language. This is not well supported in the textbooks since there are restrictions in the production of the textbook as to the depth of the treatment of topics due to target learners' language proficiency. Language teachers should be aware of the restrictions and allow learners to expand their perspectives. One limitation of the study is the reliance on only three interviews, which may constrain the breadth of insights obtained regarding textbook production practices.

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Appendix

Questions the author asked a material writer and editors in semi-structured interviews

1. Were there any policies regarding the presentation of Japanese cultures in the production of a textbook?
2. If so, what was your intension in the production of a textbook?
3. What aspects did you consider in the production of a textbook in terms of learners' intercultural understanding?
4. What cultural abilities and knowledge would you like learners to acquire by using your textbook?
5. What abilities and knowledge regarding Japanese culture would you like learners to gain by using your textbook?