Representations of gender and sexual orientation over three editions of a Japanese language learning textbook series

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Abstract

This study analyses a popular commercial textbook series for learning Japanese as a second or foreign language (JSL/JFL) and investigates how its textual and visual representations of gender and sexual orientation have changed over the three editions published over the last 20 years. Examining the interplay of text and images, the longitudinal analysis reveals that heteronormative representations remain dominant across the three editions, while observing some changes in representation over time. For instance, derogatory depictions of LGBTQ+ people have been removed and – albeit limited – representations that give consideration to gender and sexual diversity have been incorporated. Such changing representations indicate how language, gender and sexuality ideologies in Japanese society intersect with the globalised contexts of JSL/JFL, and suggest that stratified ideological values regarding gender and sexuality are enmeshed with the commercial viability of textbook publishers.

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Introduction

Over the past decade, a growing number of researchers have explored issues of gender and sexuality in second and foreign language education. These studies address how current teaching and learning practices (re)produce heteronormativity, resulting in the exclusion and marginalisation of students of diverse gender and sexual identities (e.g. Liddicoat 2009; Nelson 2010; Moore 2016). Research on the teaching of a variety of target languages has shown that teaching and learning resources represent LGBTQ+ people in limited or biased ways (e.g. Shardakova and Pavlenko 2004; Gray 2013; Paiz 2015; Pakula, Pawelczyk and Sunderland 2015; Koster and Litosseliti 2021; Pakuła 2021). The omission of diverse genders and sexualities in educational resources systematically positions LGBTQ+ identities as illegitimate or unrecognised, and discourages the incorporation of diverse identities into classroom activities (Gray 2013). Such practices can negatively affect queer students’ wellbeing and academic engagement, and may lead to their withdrawal from class (Gray 2013; Moore 2016).

Despite the educational significance of this line of research, LGBTQ+ issues in Japanese as a second and foreign language (JSL/JFL) education have not been addressed sufficiently. LGBTQ+ representation in JSL/JFL textbooks also remains underexplored. Considering the gendered characteristics of the Japanese language (Shibamoto Smith 2003) and the pivotal and ideological role of textbooks in language education, representation in JSL/JFL textbooks seems likely to affect JSL/JFL classroom practices and impact LGBTQ+ students’ learning trajectories. Accordingly, this study examines how gender and sexual orientation are both textually and visually represented in a popular commercial JSL/JFL textbook series over time. To do so, it analyses all three editions of the Genki (げんき) series, including supplementary materials, published over 20 years. The analysis aims to fill...
the research gap in JSL/JFL education. It also addresses some aspects of textbook analysis problematised by Sunderland (2015), who pointed out the devaluation of image analysis and a focus on gender at the cost of sexuality in this research field. Further, the study contributes to the understanding of how language, gender and sexuality ideologies in Japanese society are textually and visually embodied in JSL/JFL materials and how they intersect with the globalised context of JSL/JFL, where stratified ideological values of gender and sexuality, and the commercial viability of textbook publishers, are enmeshed.

The next section explores how language, gender and sexuality have been historically conceptualised through a review of Japanese language and gender studies (JLGS) literature. Conflicting theoretical understandings and ideological and transformative aspects of language and gender associations, as exemplified in this field, provide the analytical underpinnings of the study’s investigation of representation in JSL/JFL materials.

**Literature review**

*Contrasting views on Japanese language and gender*

Several Japanese linguistic features are considered to be associated with gender: pronouns, vocabulary, grammar, honorific frequency, phonology and sentence-final particles, among others (Shibamoto Smith 2003). JLGS has made use of two theoretical frameworks, essentialism and social constructionism, which contrast in how they conceptualise the association of language and gender. Around 1980, a cohort of scholars led by Ide (1979) began classifying certain speech styles and linguistic forms into two categories: ‘women’s language’ and ‘men’s language.’ In this essentialist framework, language use and behaviour by women and men are considered different from each other and homogeneous within each group, such that language automatically indexes the speaker’s biological sex. Essentialist investigations of the Japanese language and gender formed mainstream JLGS throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Yukawa and Saito 2004). Moreover, the invisibility of LGBTQ+ people in this research suggests that it was grounded upon heteronormativity – for instance, Kanamaru (1997) investigated differences in addressee terms used within couples without mentioning sexual orientation.

However, social constructionist studies that emerged during the 1990s started debunking such direct ‘indexicality’ (Silverstein 1976), revealing individual speakers’ discursive negotiation of language and identities vis-à-vis language and gender ideologies in Japanese society (Yukawa and Saito 2004). Investigations into first-person pronoun usage clearly illustrate this
radical shift in the theoretical conceptualisation of language and gender. For instance, while earlier essentialist studies defined *ore* ‘I’ and *boku* ‘I’ as male-exclusive first-person pronouns (Ide 1979; Kanamaru 1997), Miyazaki (2004) identified female junior high school students’ usage of these pronouns as indexes of rebellion against their school and teacher, and of solidarity within their group. Other research demonstrated discrepancies between generally dominant and local norms (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992) for gendered Japanese, such as Sunaoshi’s (2004) documentation of female farmers’ masculinity-disassociated usage of *ore* ‘I’ in a rural area. It was also during this period that LGBTQ+ people’s lived experiences and linguistic practices began to garner some attention in JLGS. Pioneering studies in the new paradigm demonstrated how self-identifying lesbians or gay men discursively negotiated gendered linguistic features, including first-person pronouns, and exemplified the ‘intersectionality’ (Crenshaw 1990) of gender and sexuality along with other social identities and contextual factors that affected these negotiations (e.g. Abe 2004; Maree 2007).

While these social constructionist studies have illuminated individual speakers’ discursive and multilayered negotiations of language and social identities beyond the monolithic stereotypical usage of ‘women’s language’ and ‘men’s language’, they have also emphasised how the stereotypes impinge on Japanese speakers. Stereotypical ideas about the use of language reflect language ideologies, the ‘sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use’ (Silverstein 1979:193). In other words, language ideologies imbue norms regarding how women and men should speak and behave in Japanese society, thus providing speakers with the linguistic resources to negotiate language and social identities in their linguistic practices, at times (re)producing the norms or subverting them (Nakamura 2004; Bucholtz and Hall 2005; Okamoto 2014).

It should be noted that neither stereotypical ‘women’s/men’s languages’ nor prevalent language and gender ideologies have remained static or monolithic in Japanese society, but rather reflect shifts in the social structure, such as expectations of women and men, their behaviour and language use. Inoue (2002) and Okamoto (2014) provide a concrete example of such a transformation in the Meiji era (1868–1912), wherein certain sentence-final particles in Japanese (e.g. *teyo, dawa*) went from marking the inappropriate, vulgar speech of female students to indicating sophistication in both younger and older women’s speech. Moreover, during the period of Japanese militarism in the first half of the twentieth century, ‘women’s language’ was associated with the emperor system and used to construct the uniqueness and superiority of the Japanese language in political discourse (Nakamura 2014; Okamoto 2014). More recently, Gagné
(2008:131) described how young women in Japan’s Gothic and Lolita subcultures utilise the connotations of educated upper-class femininity associated with ‘women’s language’ to recast it as postwar ‘lady’s speech’, which they deploy to ‘[speak] like “princesses”’. While their use of conventional ‘women’s language’ accords with societal gendered linguistic ideals, Gagné (2008:131) notes that such linguistic practices are erased in critical news media that reflect a discourse of youth culture as ‘a social problem and a moral panic that embodies the declining morals of Japanese youth’. To symbolise ‘dangerous’ youth cultures, the media construct and disseminate an image of the Gothic and Lolita subcultures as infantilised and inarticulate. To do so, however, the media must ignore how these speakers actually use language. As these examples suggest, gendered linguistic features do not possess inherent or set meanings, but acquire them from assigned values through semiotic processes in society (Irvine and Gal 2000; Nakamura 2014; Okamoto 2014). Hence, in any given period, ‘women’s language’ and ‘men’s language’ – which are deeply intertwined with social structures and power dynamics – represent the language and gender ideologies of their time. Social constructionist studies in JLGS exemplify the dialectical relationship between language, identities and social structure, and the ideological and transformative characteristics of the gendered Japanese language (Nakamura 2004, 2014).

JLGS has undergone theoretical development and provided an abundance of analytical data from non-Western contexts in language, gender and sexuality studies (which increasingly focus on the role of context – see Hiramoto 2021). With the growing recognition of the intersectionality of gender and sexuality, JLGS will continue to contribute to the field by providing research that ‘carries the potential to challenge the colonial histories that shape our ways of seeing the world, leading to more nuanced and locally sensitive understandings of the place of language, gender, and sexuality in everyday life’ (Hall, Borba and Hiramoto 2021:14).

**Gender, sexuality and JSL/JFL textbooks**

JLGS has established the transformative and discursive nature of language use and gender ideologies, and demonstrated that individual speakers use language to negotiate their identities as an ongoing practice. Yet the reproduction of the essentialist belief in the direct indexicality of language and gender continues in a variety of domains in contemporary Japanese society. These include fiction and popular culture, such as anime and manga, where particular linguistic features are utilised as *yakuwarigo* ‘role language’, or metapragmatic stereotypes that enable the audience to associate the user of these items with a particular personality (Teshigawara and Kinsui 2011).
Further, stereotypical gender-differentiated language is prevalent in JSL/JFL textbooks (Kawasaki and McDougall 2003; Siegal and Okamoto 2003; Thomson and Otsuji 2009; Mizumoto 2015). These representations are not necessarily reproduced in an unchanged manner, and can be challenged in the classroom – especially given the unpredictable nature of teachers’ and students’ interactions with the resources (Pawelczyk and Pakula 2015; Sunderland 2015). Nevertheless, when ‘women’s language’ and ‘men’s language’ are represented in teaching materials, classroom practices may well continue to legitimise rather than subvert them, reinforcing the learning of dichotomously gendered Japanese (Kumagai 2014).

As LGBTQ+ issues in second and foreign language education garner increasing attention, many studies have problematised the systematic erosion or marginalisation of LGBTQ+ identities in educational materials (e.g. Shardakova and Pavlenko 2004; Gray 2013; Paiz 2015; Pakuła et al. 2015; Koster and Litosseliti 2021; Pakuła 2021). As Sunderland (2021:30; emphasis original) argues, representation can be considered ‘a set of choices ... made from a wider pool ... [T]he availability and especially desirability of choices is always filtered through ideology and socially shaped beliefs.’ Thus, representation in textbooks subliminally projects some identities as socially desirable and others as socially undesirable, inevitably constraining classroom interactions. In addition, students who fail to identify with ‘normative’ identity positions may disengage from learning (Gray 2013; Moore 2016). In the context of JSL/JFL education, Arimori’s (2020) pioneering study revealed heteronormativity and cisnormativity and direct indexicality of language and gender in several JSL/JFL textbook series. However, JSL/JFL textbook research remains scarce. To the best of my knowledge, no study has investigated gender and sexual orientation representation in these materials over time, or included image analysis – which, as Sunderland (2015) argues, can add breadth and depth to such research. Therefore, this study explores how gender and sexuality are textually and visually represented in JFL/JSL educational materials, and the transformation of such representations in a perennial textbook series across multiple editions.

**Data and method**

This study analyses data collected from a popular JSL/JFL commercial textbook series, the *Genki* series, including its supplementary materials. The series is coauthored by five academics based in Japan or the United States and published by a Tokyo-based publisher, The Japan Times Publishing (formerly The Japan Times). The series mainly targets university courses and comprises *Genki I* (beginner) and *Genki II* (intermediate); English
is used as a supplementary language. Both levels have a main textbook, workbook, picture cards and teacher’s manual, all of which are included in the analysis. The series features two main characters: Mary, an exchange student from the United States, and Takeshi, a Japanese university student. The main textbooks develop romantic stories between the two, from Mary’s first encounter with Takeshi at a Japanese university (Lesson 1) to their farewell at the airport after Mary completes the exchange program (Lesson 23). The series was chosen for analysis based on its international popularity over two decades and the globalised contexts of Japanese language education; Japanese is studied in 142 countries or regions (The Japan Foundation 2020). The first edition was published in 1999, the second in 2011 and the third in 2020. The series has sold more than 2.5 million copies and has been employed at universities on four continents (The Japan Times Publishing 2021). All three editions, published over 20 years and totalling 21 textbooks and supplementary materials, were analysed to examine the representations of gender and sexual orientation in the series longitudinally. (See the appendix for detailed series information.)

All the materials, including the grammar explanation sections in English in the main textbook and the transcripts of listening exercises in the workbook, were manually scrutinised to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Are there any representations of LGBTQ+ people in the selected materials?

RQ2: How are gender and sexual orientation linguistically and visually represented in the materials?

RQ3: Is there any change in these representations across the three editions?

To explore the implicit stance of the textbooks on normative gender and sexual orientation, vocabulary related to gender and sexual orientation (e.g. first-person pronouns, ‘woman’, ‘man’, ‘mother’, ‘father’, ‘family’, ‘married’, ‘divorced’) was extracted. Descriptions (e.g. how identified vocabulary is explained or used in an exercise) and the gender and sexual orientation-related characteristics of accompanying images (e.g. physical appearance, clothing, pairings), if any, were noted. Any texts and images representing or related to LGBTQ+ people were also explored. Images are integral to representing the target language and culture in commercial language textbooks (Giaschi 2000), so analysis of both textual and visual representations can reveal messages in educational resources that analysis of a single representative mode (e.g. text or image) might fail to observe (Sunderland 2015).
For thorough scrutiny, the materials were examined twice, once by the author and once by a research assistant. Each researcher recorded relevant textual and visual elements in shared online documents that contained the chapter, page, representative mode, descriptions and/or extracts of each element. The data collected from the first, second and third editions were compared to examine whether any changes were made concerning gender and sexual orientation representation. This comparison enabled the identification of patterns across the three editions and allowed us to explore the connotations of particular representations in the entire textbook series (Sunderland 2015).

Findings

Heteronormativity and the direct indexicality of language and gender

The analysis identified some depictions of LGBTQ+ people. However, to analyse them appropriately, how the series textually and visually represents normative gender and sexual orientation across the three editions must first be examined. First, in Lesson 5 of all the editions, vocabulary directly linked to gender, such as 女の人 ‘woman’ and 男の人 ‘man’ is introduced (Banno et al. 1999a:271; Banno et al. 2011d:307; Banno et al. 2020a:313).3 One of the exercises in this lesson asks students to match the sentence 男の人と女の人がいます ‘There is a man and a woman’ with a provided picture (Banno et al. 1999a:272; Banno et al. 2011d:308; Banno et al. 2020a:314).4 The woman in the picture is illustrated as relatively short, with long hair and a slender waist, and wearing a skirt and high heels, while the man is taller, with short hair, thick eyebrows and wearing jeans and flat shoes (Figure 1). These visual characteristics represent default characteristics of women and men, with only a few minor modifications identified in this series across the three editions, including the two protagonists, Mary and Takeshi.

While the series incorporates a few instances of major visual deviations from the default, which will be discussed in the following sections, no vocabulary words outside of the gender binary, such as トランスジェンダー ‘transgender’ or ノンバイナリー ‘nonbinary’, were identified (the latter is yet to permeate Japanese society). Thus, throughout the series, the presupposed gender is woman or man, accompanied by default visual representations of gender.

Lesson 5 is also the first lesson where the association between language and gender is explicitly represented. In all three editions, the series introduces two first-person pronouns: わたし in Lesson 1 (Banno et al. 1999a:12; Banno et al. 2011d:40; Banno et al. 2020a:38) and ぼく in Lesson 5 (Banno et al. 1999a:98; Banno et al. 2011d:130; Banno et al. 2020a:130).
While the former is introduced with the English translation ‘I’, the latter is translated as ‘I (used by men)’. Furthermore, わたし is employed by Mary and other female and male characters, and is depicted as a woman pointing at herself in the picture card (Banno et al. 2006:4; Banno et al. 2011c:32; Banno et al. 2021a:L1–6). Meanwhile, ぼく is used by the male protagonist Takeshi, and John, Ken and other characters whose visuals and/or names conform to normative depictions of men in the series. A picture card for this pronoun appears in the third edition only, with an illustration of a man pointing at himself (Banno et al. 2021a:L5–15).

Because ぼく is stereotypically associated with men (Ide 1979; Kanamaru 1997), the series rightfully presents it as a gendered linguistic resource. However, this first-person pronoun (along with some others) is also used against the stereotype, as in the subversive linguistic practices recorded among female junior high school students (Miyazaki 2004) and self-identifying lesbians (Abe 2004). The explicitly gendered description of the pronoun and its normative use by gendered (in terms of names and depicted appearance) characters throughout the series reproduce the direct indexicality of language and gender and erase the ways in which a number of linguistic features in Japanese are negotiated in actual communication. Further, they facilitate the reach of hegemonic power systems into the classroom, constraining students’ first-person pronoun use; if a student is stereotypically positioned as a woman and uses ぼく (the first
person pronoun ‘used by men’ as defined in the textbook), their usage may be treated as illegitimate even if it stems from the speaker’s identity negotiation. This concern echoes that of Liddicoat (2009), who raised the alarm over labelling queer students’ negotiation of language and sexuality as a failure if it deviated from heteronormative language classroom practices. Students should be aware of how certain linguistic features are typically used in Japanese. Moreover, they should be aware of their associations with gender and the possible consequences of subversive linguistic practices. However, a language classroom that uncritically accepts explicitly gendered descriptions of pronouns and an overall normative stance on binary gender and heterosexuality cannot provide a safer space for students’ negotiation of language and identities.

In close association with gender, texts and images directly related to sexual orientation are represented throughout the series. For example, デート, on the vocabulary list in Lesson 3, is translated as ‘date (romantic, not calendar)’ across all three editions (Banno et al. 1999a:56; Banno et al. 2011d:86; Banno et al. 2020a:84). In this lesson, a dialogue between the two protagonists ensues where Takeshi asks Mary out on a date. The same vocabulary is also used in one of the exercises in Lesson 4, prompting students to form two sentences: 土曜日にデートをします ‘I have a date on Saturday’ and 日曜日にもデートをします ‘I also have a date on Sunday’. The illustration for this exercise depicts a couple, a woman and a man, walking arm in arm with a heart between them (Banno et al. 1999a:91; Banno et al. 2011d:123; Banno et al. 2020a:123). A similar illustration is used for the vocabulary picture card 結婚する ‘to get married’ in Lesson 7, where a heterosexual couple in wedding attire stand arm in arm next to a wedding cake (Banno et al. 2006:34; Banno et al. 2011c:62; Banno et al. 2021a:L7–41). Heterosexuality is further emphasised in Lesson 7 with かぞく ‘family’ as the featured topic, depicting a ‘family’ as a father and mother with children (Banno et al. 1999a:132; Banno et al. 2011a:166; Banno et al. 2020a:166).

As the series primarily depicts the story of the romantic relationship between the two protagonists, readers are inevitably exposed to an abundance of gender- and sexual orientation-related texts and visuals, as introduced above. However, vocabulary or content related to homosexuality, such as レズビアン ‘lesbian’ and ゲイ ‘gay’, or visual representations of clearly identified homosexual couples, are nonexistent across all three editions. The story of the protagonists’ romantic relationship, and gender- and sexual orientation-related texts and images explicitly and implicitly remind the reader of heteronormativity. This conforms to Moore’s (2020:121) definition of ‘heteronormative erasure’, whereby heterosexuality is used ‘as the de facto framework for all romantic relationships, excluding anything that does not fall within this narrow construction of sexuality’. The normative
stance of the series on gender and sexual orientation across all three editions will be discussed further in the following sections, especially regarding a few instances of deviation from this framework.

**LGBTQ+ people as deviations**

Concerning normative gender and sexual orientation represented within the series, the analysis also revealed a few instances that did not correspond with the default framework. These instances represent LGBTQ+ people as deviations in a derogatory manner. The series comprehensively avoids clear representations of homosexuality, with the only exception related to ちかん, a vocabulary item introduced in Lesson 21 across all three editions, with the translations: ‘sexual offender; lascivious man’ (Banno et al. 1999b:180), ‘sexual offender; pervert’ (Banno et al. 2011d: 210) and ‘groper, pervert’ (Banno et al. 2020c:208). Simultaneously, one of the exercises in the lesson provides the cues ちかん and さわる ‘to touch’ with a picture of a man groping another man’s (Takeshi’s) buttocks on a train (Banno et al. 1999b:190; Banno et al. 2011d:220; Banno et al. 2020c:218) (Figure 2). Considering the overall heteronormative erasure in the series, this sudden implication of homosexuality is obtrusive, as Arimori (2021) also points out. By mentioning homosexuality only in relation to deviant behaviour and the criminal act of nonconsensual sexual touching of a stranger, the series further marginalises homosexuality.

**Figure 2.** ちかん ‘groper, pervert,’ さわる ‘to touch’
Another visual deviation is identified in Lesson 17 of the first two editions, where a new grammar pattern, みたいですね ‘looks like,’ is introduced (Arimori 2020). Simultaneously, one of the exercises provides two cues: 男です ‘[I] am a man’ and 女 ‘woman,’ and an illustration of a person who has long hair and a slender waist with the male symbol ♂ next to it (Banno et al. 1999b:134; Banno et al. 2011d:106) (Figure 3). Students are expected to answer 女みたいですね ‘[He] looks like a woman.’ This exercise textually and visually reproduces the gender binary and marginalises those who fail to fit the norms of either category; the rare appearance of a gender nonconforming person who is framed as the subject of gendered commentary accentuates the atypical and contentious nature of the gendered characteristics of the figure. However, in the third edition, the exercise was replaced with one unrelated to gender or sexual orientation (Banno et al. 2020c:130).

A similar derogatory illustration can be found concerning the vocabulary item じろじろ見る ‘to stare at’ in Lesson 8. The first edition of the picture card illustrates a man staring at a person who has thick eyebrows, body hair and a visible Adam’s apple, and is wearing makeup, a skirt and high heels – apparently a crossdresser (Banno et al. 2006:37) (Figure 4).

The genders generally represented in the series are gender-normative women and men, meaning that this person, whose appearance clearly fails to correspond to the default visuals of either category, conflicts with the
gender binary framework of the series. Further, by combining the image with the text じろじろ見る ‘to stare at,’ the series implies that those who fail to conform to the binary framework are deviations/subjects to be ogled. This example echoes what Pakula et al. (2015:55) call ‘multimodal disambiguation,’ where the possibilities of diverse interpretations enabled by a single modality are lost due to the other accompanying modality. While they show a case where an accompanying heterosexual image curtailed a possible homosexual reading of a text, the interplay of the text and image of じろじろ見る ‘to stare at’ in this study creates a derogatory interpretation of gender and sexual diversity, whereas the text alone is utterly irrelevant to such interpretations. Notably, in the second edition, the crossdresser was replaced by a person dressed as a panda (Banno et al. 2011f:65), while, in the third edition, the vocabulary item was removed entirely.

![Figure 4. じろじろ見る ‘to stare at’](image)

The series’ derogatory portrayals echo the discriminatory gender and sexual diversity stereotypes disseminated through Japanese mainstream media during the early 1990s so-called ‘gay boom’ (McLelland 2000). A typical example is a famous Japanese TV show of the 1980s and 1990s, which featured a male comedian playing a gay man named 保毛尾田保毛男 Homooda Homoo. The man’s name stems from the derogatory term homo for gay men. As evident from the name, the character’s eccentric appearance and demeanour are intended to index his nonnormative gender and sexuality. Due to the comedian’s fame, the gay character gained
widespread popularity, with its discriminatory projection of gayness being widely circulated on TV. Such representations of gay people as surprising ‘objects of humour for media consumption’ (McLelland 2000:53) played a significant role in shaping the dominant discourse of mocking and abnor-
malising gender and sexual minorities in Japanese society (McLelland 2000; Tamagawa 2020). However, the show’s comeback in 2017, marking its 30th anniversary, attracted completely different audience responses: the TV station was inundated with complaints, and it subsequently made an official apology (Kyodo News 2017). To some degree, this indicates an attitudinal change towards gender and sexual diversity in Japanese society over time, leading to a gradual transformation or attempts in the public domain to advance LGBTQ+ rights (Sunagawa 2006).

Regarding the Genki series, both the adoption and deletion of discrim-
inatory portrayals might embody changing ideologies of language, gender and sexuality in Japanese society. However, it should be underscored that those depictions were deliberately ‘chosen’ (among many other possibili-
ties) and incorporated into learning materials, thus reproducing deroga-
tory stereotypes of gender and sexual diversity of the time. This agentive act by stakeholders is by no means neutral and calls for more deliberation on the possible pedagogical consequences of including or excluding particular representations, including the case of ちかん ‘groper, pervert’ discussed above, which still exists in the latest edition. The changes identified in the series’ approach to gender and sexual orientation across the three editions will be discussed further in the next section.

Ambivalence towards LGBTQ+ inclusion

Although heteronormative erasure in the series is fairly thorough, the analysis of all three editions revealed some changes in their approach to gender and sexual orientation. Still, an ambivalent position towards LGBTQ+ inclusion was also detected. One such change can be seen in Lesson 16, a class activity featuring お見合い – a meeting between potential spouses (Banno et al. 1999b:84–85; Banno et al. 2011d:111; Banno et al. 2021b:106–107). Students are instructed to ask three people in their class whether they are willing to do things such as cooking, taking out the gar-
bage and buying presents after they get married. After the interview, they inform the class whom they want to see again and why. While the task itself has not changed across the three editions, the caveat in the teacher’s guide has transformed significantly. The first edition includes this suggestion: クラスの男女比が同じでない場合は、学生のだれかに男役になったり、女役になったりしてもらう ‘If the class ratio of men and women is unequal, ask some students to play the role of men or women’ (Banno et
al. 2000c:76), clearly framing heteronormativity. In the second edition, this changed to: ...「お見合いパーティー」は、日本では男女間で行われるのが一般的だが、クラスで行う場合は学生の性的嗜好に配慮したほうがいい。... "Omiai Party" is generally held among men and women in Japan, but it is better to consider students’ sexual preference when incorporating this activity in class’ (Banno et al. 2012:92). Thus, the first half of the instruction still legitimises heterosexual orientation, although the explicit instruction to consider students’ sexual orientation now appears in the sub-material. In the third edition, 性的嗜好 ‘sexual preference’ is changed to 多様性 ‘diversity’ (Banno et al. 2021c:112), expanding the scope of gender and sexual diversity that teachers should consider.

In the third edition, added vocabulary in Lesson 14 also demonstrates the consideration of the series for gender and sexual diversity to some degree. One of the exercises in this lesson (across all three editions) instructs students to ask questions in pairs, including 結婚していますか ‘Are you married?’ and 子供がいますか ‘Do you have a child?’ (Banno et al. 1999b:42; Banno et al. 2011d:64; Banno et al. 2020c:60). One question in the same exercise changed from 奥さん/ご主人はどんな人ですか ‘What is your wife or husband like?’ (the first and second edition) to 奥さん/ご主人/パートナーはどんな人ですか ‘What is your wife, husband or partner like?’ (the third edition). The vocabulary, パートナー ‘partner’, is newly added next to 奥さん ‘[your/someone’s] wife’ and ご主人 ‘[your /someone’s] husband’ in the question as well as to the vocabulary list of the lesson. Notably, the two vocabulary words 奥さん ‘[your/someone’s] wife’ and ご主人 ‘[your/someone’s] husband’ are controversial in general society in Japan due to their literal meanings: ‘person inside a house’ and ‘master’, respectively. Thus, including a gender-neutral addressee term also fosters gender equity between women and men. However, the picture card used for ‘partner’ enables a different interpretation of the text. While the picture card for 奥さん ‘[your/someone’s] wife’ and ご主人 ‘[your/someone’s] husband’ illustrates a clearly identifiable woman and man as a couple in one card (corresponding to the default visuals of the series – Banno et al. 2021b:L14–1) (Figure 5), the one for パートナー ‘partner’ illustrates two people with their arms around each other, whose physical features and clothing are completely obscured by its dot-and-line style of drawing (L14–2) (Figure 6). This featureless and genderless illustration is clearly demarcated from other gendered visuals employed in the materials across all three editions. Although the image does not explicitly depict a homosexual couple, it leaves some ambiguity to the gender and sexual orientation allocated to the two people, possibly implying that the vocabulary item is not necessarily used among heterosexual couples. This interpretation is enabled only when the text and images of the series are longitudinally
analysed, shedding light on what this visual deviation indexes against the normative framework of gender and sexual orientation represented across the entire series (Sunderland 2015).

Figure 5. Picture for 奥さん ‘[your/someone’s] wife’ and ご主人 ‘[your/someone’s] husband’

Figure 6. Picture for パートナー ‘partner’
The reproduction of binary gender and heterosexuality in the series is evident, given the protagonists’ heterosexual romantic relationship as the linchpin of its story development. However, the third edition has distinctly diminished the active and explicit representations of the normative framework of gender and sexual orientation identified in the first two editions. This analysis corresponds with the publisher’s claim that they considered avoiding stereotypical illustrations and expressions regarding gender and sexual orientation in the third edition (The Japan Times Publishing 2021). However, the subtlety of these considerations suggests the publisher’s strong ambivalence towards LGBTQ+ inclusivity in their content. The intersection of LGBTQ+ representation in JSL/JFL teaching materials and the global context of JSL/JFL will be further discussed in the next section.

Discussion and conclusion

By examining gender and sexual orientation representations in the targeted series, we observed how it exhaustively represents heteronormativity across all three editions. We also observed some change in its approach to gender and sexual orientation over time, such as the removal of a derogatory depiction of a nonbinary person and, while limited, the incorporation of representations that give consideration to gender and sexual diversity. Without longitudinally examining the interplay of text and images, the different levels of heteronormativity would not have been identified, illustrating the significance of both the longitudinal approach and of combined textual and visual analysis. These changes in representation could be interpreted as embodying changes in language, gender and sexuality ideologies in Japanese society. As previously discussed, the direct indexicality of language and gender, and rigidly dichotomous gender roles were once politically legitimised and disseminated (Nakamura 2014; Okamoto 2014), and were further validated in the essentialist academic discourses of the early decades of JLGS. Moreover, through portrayals of gender and sexual diversity as laughable in Japanese mainstream media, discriminatory stereotypes of gender and sexual minorities were disseminated in the 1990s (McLelland 2000; Tamagawa 2020). Given the history and continuity in discourse that disregards and marginalises gender and sexual diversity, it is not surprising that this study’s analysis identified comprehensive legitimisation of heterosexuality and derogatory representations of LGBTQ+ people in the educational materials. Both explicit and implicit stigmatising discourse against queer people still exists in contemporary Japanese society, and the country still has not legalised same-sex marriage. However, subversive discourse against the systematic reproduction of dichotomous gender and sexuality norms has started to emerge in public domains in
representations of gender and sexual orientation, as seen in the general public’s critical responses to the derogatory depiction of a gay character on a TV show, mentioned above, and the Japanese government’s attempt – albeit unsuccessful – to pass a national nondiscrimination law to protect LGBTQ+ people in 2021 (Kyodo News 2021). As such, although limited, the changes in gender and sexual orientation representations identified in the materials may reflect the changing discourse on queer people in a Japanese society susceptible to global LGBTQ+ rights advocacy, as seen in the growing number of countries legalising same-sex marriage (ILGA World 2020).

To explore how the approach to gender and sexual orientation has changed in the targeted series, it is also worth considering the globalised context of JSL/JFL, where stratified ideological values on gender and sexuality and the commercial viability of textbook publishers are enmeshed. As evident in the publisher’s advertisement, the Genki series targets the global market (The Japan Times Publishing 2021). The inclusion of a hijab-wearing character and expressions such as これはハラルフードですか ‘Is this halal?’ in the third edition (Banno et al. 2020a:209) clearly indicate that their market includes Muslim-majority countries. For example, Indonesia has the second largest number of Japanese language learners (The Japan Foundation 2020). Goldstein (2015) reports that explicit incorporation of LGBTQ+ representations in an ESL/EFL textbook resulted in conflict with some Christian schools in the publisher’s key markets, Spain and Latin America, and a ban in the Turkish market. This suggests that incorporating such content could reduce commercial viability for religious reasons, resulting in publishers’ ambivalence about actively incorporating LGBTQ+ content (Paiz 2018). As such, the highly political and ideological values with which gender and sexuality are imbued can act as a considerable barrier for publishers to shift towards queer inclusion in educational materials in the global market. Thus, the findings of this study reflect the discursive and multilayered power flows associated with language, gender and sexuality, which are susceptible to both local and global discourses.

Regarding pedagogical implications, the changes in the later edition, however limited (e.g. the textual and visual incorporation of the vocabulary word ‘partner’ and the explicit caveat in the teacher’s manual about students’ sexual orientation or diversity), might suggest a way forward for inclusive education. Nevertheless, the overall normalisation of the gender binary and heterosexual orientation in the series indicates the urgency of raising stakeholders’ awareness of the issue and of constructing safer learning spaces for students with diverse gender and sexual identities. Teachers should be trained to be critical of educational materials and provide alternative local materials to challenge the represented norms of commercialised resources. Given the global market’s constraints, stakeholders
must negotiate representation locally in the classroom, while simultaneously pursuing queer inclusion from publishers. Further, the subtle and creative incorporation of LGBTQ+ content may be an effective strategy for manoeuvring around the censorship of the dominant discourse or the authoritative power of politically sensitive contexts (Goldstein 2015).

This article has focused on JSL/JFL materials for university courses in the global market; research on textbooks with different audiences (e.g. local primary and secondary school students) is needed to explore how target markets affect the approach of materials to gender and sexual orientation. In addition, as Pawelczyk and Pakuła (2015), Sunderland (2015, 2021) and Koster and Litosseliti (2021) argue, how teachers and students engage with textbooks in class should be investigated to understand how the normative framework of gender and sexual orientation represented in educational resources is reproduced, subverted or negotiated in actual classroom practices. After all, how the textbooks are used is susceptible to teachers’ and students’ preferences and actions, and other context-specific factors that may or may not result in constructing a safe learning space or enabling LGBTQ+ students to strategically negotiate queer identities to their advantage. Without monolithically labelling LGBTQ+ students as oppressed in contrast to oppressors (Pennycook 2021), investigations into such domains will provide us with a more holistic picture of the complicated power operations within JSL/JFL education, where differing ideologies of language, gender and sexuality in local and global contexts intersect.


| Title: Genki: An Integrated Course in Elementary Japanese |
| Authors: Banno, Eri, Ikeda, Yoko, Ohno, Yutaka, Shinagawa, Chikako and Tokashiki, Kyoko |
| Publisher: The Japan Times (1st edition); The Japan Times Publishing (2nd and 3rd editions) |


| Main textbook I | 1999a |
| Workbook I | 2000a |
| Picture cards I | 2006 |
| Main textbook II | 1999b |
| Workbook II | 2000b |
| Picture cards II | 2007 |
| Teacher’s manual | 2000c |
Table A2: Second edition, 2011–2012

<table>
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<th>Item</th>
<th>Date</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main textbook I</td>
<td>2011a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workbook I</td>
<td>2011b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picture cards I</td>
<td>2011c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main textbook II</td>
<td>2011d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workbook II</td>
<td>2011e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picture cards II</td>
<td>2011f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher’s manual</td>
<td>2012</td>
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Table A3: Third edition, 2020–2021

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workbook I</td>
<td>2020b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picture cards I</td>
<td>2021a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Main textbook II</td>
<td>2020c</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workbook II</td>
<td>2020d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picture cards II</td>
<td>2021b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher’s guide</td>
<td>2021c</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

About the author

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Note

1. Some supplementary materials for each edition are published in different years (see appendix).
2. While multimodality is relevant to text and image analysis, comprehensive multimodal analyses are beyond the scope of this article (Kress 2009).
3. The examples are extracted from the main textbooks unless stated otherwise.
4. Example texts are translated by the author unless stated otherwise.
References


