

特集 他とかかわる力を育てる

# Characters and identity in *NEW CROWN*

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In creating the upcoming edition of *NEW CROWN*, one of the major and early issues that concerned the writing and editing team was the identities of the main and continuing characters in the series. We confronted matters of sexual balance, geographic as well as linguistic diversity, while creating recurring characters that would be accessible to and likable by Japanese junior high school students.

## Identities based on sex

One of the first matters we confronted was sexual balance. The mostly male team of writers and editors quickly decided that sexual balance was essential – male and female characters needed to be equally present in all categories and equally present in the text.

Further, there was general agreement that all characters should be gender-neutral in language and character, that all should clearly have strengths and that these strengths should, to a degree, contrast with dominant gender stereotypes.

## Identities of place

A second series of discussions involved where to place the textbook series and what the origins of the characters would be.

Some members of the writing team wanted to set the series in an English speaking

country. They pointed out that successful second and foreign language programs, such as those sponsored by the EU, tend to set the textbooks in a country in which the target language is a native language. French as a second language textbooks are set in France. Greek language textbooks in Greece.

Other writers opposed this. They raised the point that first, there are multiple English speaking countries to choose from, and to select one might imply an endorsement of that country's life, culture, and politics, an issue that no one wanted to get into. In addition, they noted that the Japanese junior high school students live in Japan and will primarily use English in Japan. Hence, the characters attend a Japanese public junior high school in the suburbs of an unnamed major city.

These discussions and decisions lead into the matter of English identities of the characters.

## Identities of English and place

Discussions dealing with the English identities of the characters, while stretching over three or four meetings, decided to use a three-part division of English onto circles of usage: an inner-circle of countries in which English is a native language (such as Great Britain, the US, and Australia); an outer-circle of countries in which English is a second or

third language (such as India); and an expanding circle of countries in which English is a foreign language (such as Japan and China). Characters were to come more or less equally from all three circles of language usage.

This led to spirited discussions of which countries to include. Some writers wanted a near global cast of characters with all continents and all major regions represented. Others suggested focusing on countries that shared a level of development and connection with Japan, as they would be culturally similar to the students and hence easier to teach. The writing team finally reached a compromise of sorts: to focus, as far as possible, on characters from Asian-Pacific countries: Japan, the US, Australia, India, and China. Countries from other regions, notably Africa and Europe) would be brought in as the occasion allowed.

## Conclusions







Based on these issues of sexual, geographic and linguistic identities, we wound up with six central recurring characters: Ken – male, from Japan; Kumi – female from Japan, Emma – female from

Australia, Paul – male from the US, Meiling – female from China, and Raj – male from India. They broadly balance the matters noted above. I feel this is good for pedagogical and psychological reasons.

Pedagogically, this balance of characters provide models for students to emulate – characters who are going through or have gone through language learning situations similar to those the students are now experiencing. Further, the range of characters provides visual and audio clues to help students distinguish who is speaking to whom.

Psychologically, this balance of characters gives students an equal number of characters to identify with – male and female, Japanese and non-Japanese, native speaker and those learning Japanese as they now learn English. This would encourage all students to feel that they could succeed in learning English.

In these ways, and for these reasons, the New Crown English series brings balance and coherence to the characters students encounter while learning English.

<p>☐ <b>Make friends (Raj)</b> I learned that I can use English to make friends. We may not understand each other's native language. But with English, we can share our ideas and feelings. Now I know how to make friends in Japan and all over the world.</p>		<p>☐ <b>Think globally (Meiling)</b> I have learned about many important topics in English class. I studied about global warming, war and human rights. Learning English helped me to become a better person. English taught me how to think about our world.</p>	
<p>☐ <b>Listen carefully (Emma)</b> My English got better as I studied Japanese. The more I experienced Japanese culture, the better I understood Australian culture. I know now learning about others means learning about myself. It is important to listen carefully to others and respect our differences.</p>		<p>☐ <b>Think differently (Ken)</b> When I speak English with my friends, I think in one way. When I speak Japanese with them, I think in another. It's like changing clothes. We think and act differently in each language.</p>	
<p>☐ <b>Speak simply (Paul)</b> I thought I was a good English speaker. But I found that my English was difficult for my Japanese friends. Now I know what to do when I speak English. I need to think clearly to speak simply.</p>		<p>☐ <b>Take the next step (Kumi)</b> At first learning English was difficult for me. But slowly I learned more about the language and its speakers. I see now learning English is just the first step for me. Now I want to learn other languages. This will help me to act as a global citizen.</p>	

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