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What's in a Name? Assimilation Ideology in Picturebooks

Grit Alter

Abstract

This paper examines the implementation of assimilation ideology in picturebooks. Texts such as *My Name is Yoon* (Recorvits & Swiatkowska, 2003) and *The Name Jar* (Choi, 2001) present two Korean girls' arrival in a new school environment that has difficulty pronouncing their names. Consequently, they demand substituting the Korean spelling with English spelling and changing the name to an American one. The analysis reveals that although the picturebooks may offer real-life experiences of immigrant children, the protagonists respond in different ways to their name changes. A critical reading of these picturebooks allows readers to identify an assimilationist ideology. The paper will conclude that investigating this highly topical subject has the potential to address related educational issues in innovative ways, and students of different age groups can critically reflect on the texts, their sociopolitical dimension and develop their critical literacy.

Keywords: assimilation ideology, pluralism, intercultural learning, naming, identity, picturebooks

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Introduction

A person's name can be regarded as one central contribution to ethnic self-esteem, especially within migration experiences. According to Bauman (2005), a name is one part of a person's identity that remains solid when they experience major changes such as immigration. Verkuyten (2009) notes that studies have shown 'ethnic self-esteem [is] an important factor against assimilationist notions that undermine minority members' ability to live by their ethnic identity and that threaten their group's positive distinctiveness' (p. 274). Within past and current immigration processes, a person's name often resembles a personal link to their home culture, to communities, to family members they may have left behind, and/or a close link to new social networks. Yet name changes can also be a means of integrating into a new society and thus support individuals in arriving at their new homes.

Recent picturebooks broach the topic of migration and reflect initial experiences of being new to a community. *My Name is Yoon* (Recorvits & Swiatkowska, 2003) and *The Name Jar* (Choi, 2001) depict experiences of arrival from the perspective of two Korean girls who immigrate to the United States together with their parents. The immigrant children need to negotiate becoming part of a new community and face a school community that has difficulty pronouncing their Korean names. Instead of trying to pronounce the names correctly or learning more about the Korean spelling system, students and teachers suggest that the newcomers use American names and Roman script. As these changes may cause conflicts with their cultural identity, the immigrant children try to resist such forms of assimilation and to keep their names and the associations they imply in striving to forge a multicultural identity.

Both texts deal with arrival, but treat the issue of ethnic names differently and entail a different approach to assimilation ideology in contrast to maintenance of culture. While the parents in the picturebooks try to make their children's cultural identity less visible, the children themselves are aware of the significance of their names for establishing a balanced hybrid identity in the new country. In *The Name Jar,* Unhei resists blending into her new surroundings as she develops the self-confidence to introduce herself as Unhei and teaches her classmates the Korean spelling. In *My Name is Yoon,* however, Yoon transforms from a sad but self-confident Korean girl to a happy but assimilated American

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schoolchild as parents and the teacher convince her to refrain from using the Korean spelling of her name. As the discussion in this article reveals, both books come with a clear pedagogical objective: Be proud of your cultural heritage, but adjust to the new country's norms to an extent that it makes it possible for your new community to address you, be it by spelling your name 'correctly' or by being patient and inventive in teaching others your name. While *My Name is Yoon* supports an ideology of monoculturalism and assimilation, *The Name Jar* manages to overcome this ideology through presenting a protagonist who becomes more self-confident through actively negotiating their cultural heritage.

Using Hollindale's (1988) levels of ideology in children's texts and Fox and Short's (2003) elaboration on authenticity as main references, this article explores both picturebooks to exemplify how these implement in young readers a certain norm of dealing with immigrants. The article considers the protagonists' agency, their positioning within the text and the relation of text and illustration to suggest how students of different age groups develop visual and critical literacy.

Ideology in Children's Literature

The reflection of ideology in children's literature can look back on an extended debate. In Germany, for instance, political literary works written for adolescents during World War II reflected an early inclusion of conscious or unconscious statements about a society's canon of norms and morals. These aimed at fostering an identification with Nazi heroes in the young people of the day. As Jaroslawski and Steinlein (1976) emphasize, these served as propaganda and indoctrination of children and young adults according to a certain political mindset. In more recent children's literature, ideology may be more subtle, but as McCallum and Stephens agree '[n]o narrative is without an ideology' (2011, p. 370). Indeed, ideology is an 'inevitable […] factor in the transaction between books and children' (Hollindale, 1988, p. 10) and even the simplest book cannot be 'innocent of some ideology' (Hunt, 1992, p. 18). McCallum and Stephens define ideologies as

> the systems of belief which are shared and used by a society to make sense of the world and which pervade the talk and behaviors of a community, and form the basis of the social representation and practices of group members. […] Texts produced

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for children seldom thematize ideology, but either implicitly reflect its social function of defining group values or seek to challenge received ideologies and substitute new formations. (McCallum & Stephens, 2011, p. 370)

Borrelli (1991) argues that unveiling ideologies in children's literature aims at questioning 'political, social and economic realities and the legitimation of power' (p. 278). On a social level, ideology functions as 'defining and sustaining group values', while on a cognitive level ideology functions as 'supplying a meaningful organization of the social attitudes and relationships which constitute narrative plots' (McCallum & Stephens, 2011, p. 360). As will be argued, these functions are especially apparent in children's literature written specifically for the youngest members of society. Apart from offering imaginative secondary worlds and opportunities for being 'Lost in a Book' (Nell, 1988), literature for young readers also serves as a means to convey society's norms and values. Thus, investigating the different modes in which ideology can be included in children's literature is especially revealing, as this reflects the mindset which authors, publishers and further agents involved in the children's book market consider appropriate.

Books for children include ideology on different levels. Hollindale (1988) calls the first level 'intended surface ideology' (p. 11) which becomes visible through 'the explicit social, political or moral beliefs of the individual writer, and his wish to recommend them to children through the story. […] Its presence is conscious, deliberate and in some measure "pointed" ' (pp. 10-11). The second level reflects a rather passive ideology included through the author's 'individual […] unexamined assumptions' (p. 12), and can be detected by closely reading a text. On this level, authors rather unconsciously include values and societal conventions taken for granted and widely shared by the society that surrounds them. This would carry the greatest potency with less critical readers, who may read humorous or ironic passages literally (Hollindale, 1988, p. 13; Nodelman & Reimer, 2003). Finally, the 'private, unrepeatable configurations which writers make at a rather subconscious level from the common stock of their experience' (Hollindale, 1988, p. 15) define the third level. Here, the choice of words and rules of language and further features of a certain ideology are seen as 'natural'. According to Hollindale, a set of truths of a

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society as a whole defines how readers understand literature and what kinds of meaning an expression entails.[1]

Name Changes and Assimilation

Name changes can be seen as one means of cultural assimilation to a new community. This refers to processes by which one group comes to resemble another group according to language use and further markers of cultural identity such as religion, habit, norms, values, and celebrating festivities. Verkuyten (2009) describes how power determines such processes, when often the minority that usually has less power voluntarily or involuntarily assimilates to a more powerful group, often the majority (cf. p. 269). Referring to naming, this implies that immigrants adopt a name from their new environment in order to blend in more easily.

While scholars such as Przecha (n.d.) dispute the theory that in the past authorities frequently changed immigrants' names when they arrived on Ellis Island, name changes were still part of arrival in the new society, and often initiated by the immigrants themselves. Przecha assumes that reasons for this lie with increased opportunities on the job market, assimilating American culture, or merely for simplicity. In addition, reasons for name changes emerge from difficulties the new community could have with pronouncing the original names. Roberts (2010) presents a similar case in point: 'adopting names that sounded more American might help immigrants speed assimilation, avoid detection, deter discrimination or just be better for the businesses they hoped to start in their new homeland' (unpaginated). The author states that for Asians, name changes are less effective as their physical features may arguably more easily identify them. Still, Carneiro, Lee and Reis (2016) observed that between 1900 and 1930, Asians who changed their names still found an 'increase in annual earning after a name change and argued that those changes are a response to discrimination' (p. 4).

International child adoption is a further field in which name changes frequently occur. Sadowski-Smith (2011) elaborates that name changes aimed at 'prevent[ing] the ethnic "othering" of [the] children, usually by incorporating them into the parents' own symbolic constructed "white" ethnic "heritage" ' (p. 14). By changing names that were too foreign, adoptive parents tried to eradicate the child's national difference and to establish

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in children a sense of belonging to their new family. Apparently, such practices were justified: Roediger (as cited in Sadowski-Smith, 2011) reports that children with Eastern European or long names were humiliated in public schools up until the 1940s. Also currently, adoptive parents fear that their children's names 'could become grounds for ethnicization' in view of Eastern European immigrant identities (Sadowski-Smith, 2011). One could assume that picturebooks published in a multicultural society such as the US would no longer encourage such practices but rather present self-confident multicultural identities. Yet it is revealing how selected picturebooks present a newcomer's arrival in terms of dealing with names.

Assimilation, Plurality and Cultural Identity in Picturebooks

The following section informs the reader about the content of the selected picturebooks included in this critical discussion. Additionally, it offers details about the authors and illustrators to qualify their approach to assimilation ideology. The critical reflection then focuses on assimilation processes and the protagonists' self-image, and the negotiation of pluralism. As the two female protagonists remain in rather traditional roles and are ascribed stereotypical traits of character, the article also sheds light on the depiction of gender roles in the two picturebooks. Further, it focuses on the role and function of parents and teachers, as they are responsible for the child's well-being, education and safekeeping. These categories are also explored in the paragraphs on the teaching potential of the books.

Assimilation Processes and Self-Image

My Name is Yoon narrates Yoon's arrival in the US after she and her parents emigrate from Korea. The author introduces the girl as an unhappy immigrant who rejects using the English spelling system for her name and explicitly states that she prefers to go back to Korea rather than stay in the US. One of the initial dislikes regards the way her father spells YOON in English. The girl wrinkles her nose: 'I did not like YOON. Lines. Circles. Each standing alone. My name looks happy in Korean. […] The symbols dance together' (Recorvits & Swiatkowska, 2003, unpaginated). Yoon recognizes the fragmentation of the single letters of her name and fears a similar fragmentation of her identity, and that she could be alone in the US finding it difficult to make new friends.

When the teacher tries to make Yoon spell her name using the Roman alphabet, the girl expresses her unwillingness to do so by writing 'cat', 'bird' and 'cupcake' instead of YOON. Only after she finds a first friend, a white girl with a blonde ponytail, does she sing a song in English. When her mother expresses how proud she is, Yoon admits that '[m]aybe America will be a good home. […] Maybe different is good, too'. This can be seen as a first indicator of arrival. Indeed, the next day at school, Yoon finally prints her name YOON. The teacher is happy and offers her an all-embracing hug.

While this article offers a critical reading of how the assimilation process and agency are depicted, readers should be aware that the picturebook also has beneficial aspects. For example, it shows how immigrant children can actually transcend resistance and move toward adjustment which is essential regarding current migration processes. Children who immigrate and find it difficult to come to terms with this experience see that it takes some time until they may find friends and feel more comfortable in the new environment. Indeed, *My Name is Yoon* provides a hopeful outlook when children deal with immigration patiently.

My Name is Yoon won a number of awards. In the American Library Association's justification for awarding the Notable Children's Book Award, they praise '[u]nusual perspectives and amusing detail, [the book] captures Yoon's transition from a shy newcomer to a happy schoolgirl who is willing, at last, to write the American version of her beloved Korean name' (American Library Association, n.d.). Gabi Swiatkowska won the Ezra Jack Keats Award in 2004 for the illustrations. Ezra Keats himself was an author who appreciated multiculturalism. 'He wanted no child to be an outsider' and assumed that if 'we could see each other exactly as the other is [...] this would be a different world' (Ezra Jack Keats Foundation homepage, n.d.). Despite the fact that Chun Huang (2008) focuses on positive messages such as 'respect and acceptance to different cultures and self-recognition and value', a critical reading of the book unveils its more problematic notions, which become apparent in comparison to how *The Name Jar* depicts assimilation through naming (see below). One could challenge in how far the picturebook aligns to this philosophy, as it favours Yoon's assimilation to US society that does not offer her any space for keeping the Korean spelling or using both printing systems.

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My Name is Yoon reflects processes of Americanizing newcomers, who are basically seen as equal, but for whom it is necessary to 'acquire skills in order to participate in mainstream' (Yoon et al., 2010, p. 110). While the protagonist has a very strong voice of resistance at the beginning of the picturebook, she slowly adjusts to the new situation and finally calls America her new home. Although she wants to be a bird or a cat – animals that are relatively small, shy, agile, can escape fast and hide, or snuggle – she later refrains from rejecting the new writing system and makes herself clearly visible by printing 'Yoon on every line' (Recorvits & Swiatkowska, 2003, unpaginated). As Yoon, Simpson and Haag (2010) observe, culturally or linguistically different students – the other – are the ones who need to assimilate in order to be part of the system and, in the girl's case, to be happy. The 'assimilation approach' reflected in this book 'recognizes equity, but it can only be achieved when the minorities acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for participating in a mainstream […] society' (Gorski, 2009 in Yoon et al., 2010, p. 110). The protagonist Yoon does not imply that she will remember the Korean spelling of her name, but blends in completely and loses a potential for developing pluriliteracy.

Remarkably, the illustrations symbolically mirror Yoon's transition from not being at home in one or the other culture after arriving in the US. Certain elements in the pictures are cut in half, for example the apple in the second opening or Yoon's face in the fifth opening (Recorvits & Swiatkowska, 2003). Open windows or paintings in the background of almost every opening depict a similar two-sided identity development. While Yoon is physically present in the US, she is longing to be somewhere else, and a memory of the world from which she emigrated is always in the back of her mind. This can be derived from the 12th opening, in which the colours and landscape that are visible through the windows and in the paintings contrast with the presence and inner struggle in which Yoon is caught. Similarly, the perspective is decisive: whenever Yoon is at home and expresses her hesitation to either speak English or use the English writing system, she stands on tiles that follow straight vanishing points, usually aiming at a window or a painting in the background.

Yet, it is significant to observe that windows and paintings occupy less and less space as Yoon's resistance to adopt the new language decreases. This indicates that her ethnic identity is beginning to change and develop, and symbolises the dynamic character

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of cultural identity that Hall (1990) describes (see below). In the final openings, Yoon is part of this outside space that was shown through the windows; her longing and presence merge into one. When teachers draw students' attention to such interplay of verbal and visual text, they can engage learners in the development of visual literacy.

Diversity and plurality versus assimilation

In *The Name Jar*, the protagonist Unhei is able to keep her name and teach it to her classmates despite their ridicule. Similar to Yoon, Unhei arrives in the US from Korea and has problems with her name – not with the spelling system but with her class community pronouncing it incorrectly. At home, Unhei asks her mother whether she could have her own American name because she does not want to be different. Her mother reminds Unhei of the naming tradition in Korea, i.e. that she and her grandmother went to a name master, and says that being different is 'a good thing'. The process in which Unhei negotiates her name reflects the significance her name carries for her cultural identity. Unhei's name has strong communal ties to her grandmother, as she reassures her that no matter how far apart, the girl will still be her Unhei. She is also aware of the significance of the name stamp she received from her grandmother. In Fanon's estimation, losing a name would deform a person's cultural identity and produce an 'individual […] without an anchor, without horizon, colorless, stateless, rootless' (as cited in Hall, 1990, p. 226), the grandmother and the name stamp present such an anchor. Unhei first shows the name stamp when Joey approaches her after the lesson in which Unhei finds a name jar on her desk. During the lesson, she picks out the names and reads them aloud and her classmates explain what the names mean to them: Daisy is a girl's baby sister, Tamela is a brave and smart character in a storybook, Wensdy could work because she came on a Wednesday; other names refer to street names. One classmate suggests she should close her eyes and pick a name, as they did not get to choose theirs either. None of the suggested names resembles any Korean features, neither disparaged, stereotyped, nor idealized, but only standardized or fantasy names (Tamela being the exception). When all the other pupils have left the room, Joey goes to her desk, introduces himself and asks for her name. Instead of saying it, she shows him the name stamp and explains the tradition.

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The shopkeeper also reinforces Unhei's self-esteem and reminds her of the value of her name. He refers to its literal meaning, as Unhei means 'grace' and resembles a 'graceful name for a graceful girl' (Choi, 2001, unpaginated). These incidents and Unhei's awareness of the Korean naming tradition make it very difficult for her to pick a new American name despite the ridicule she is facing.

Immigrating to a new country destabilizes children's social and individual reality. While their surroundings are increasingly unsteady, they have to keep their names as one central feature of an inner stability and position themselves as who they are as individuals. Simultaneously, as Hall (1990) observes, cultural identities are highly dynamic and changing, they 'undergo constant transformation' and are not 'eternally fixed in some essential past' but are 'subject to the continuous "play" of history, culture and power' (p. 225). This becomes visible when Unhei introduces herself with different American names in front of a mirror before going to bed. She refers to herself using the suggested names, but finds that these sound awkward and concludes that American kids will not like her. Here, Unhei's immigration experience, which is closely connected to changing her name, not only threatens to disrupt her ethnic identity but also has severe consequences for her social life. She thinks that her Korean name and the strange sound of American names will prevent her from finding friends and establishing a social net. In terms of Hall's (1990) framing of identity by two axes, the children's names present 'the vector of similarity and continuity', while their surroundings are on 'the vector of difference and rupture' (p. 226). When the second vector is disrupted, 'some grounding in, some continuity with, the past' (Hall 1990, p. 227) is highly significant for the protagonists' 'culture keeping' (Jacobson, 2008). A similar model can be identified in reference to Bauman's (2005) elaboration on a postmodern identity crisis. Unhei's approach underscores the notion that an individual's name remains a solid foundation and continuity for re-establishing identity when major changes such as immigration occur. When she finally introduces herself as Unhei, she establishes her name as a symbol of a successful resistance to assimilation and as a central feature of cultural identity.

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Agency versus self-determination

Children's reactions to being uprooted pass through different stages, which also influence their agency. Based on her work with immigrant children, Igoa (1995) describes different stages of uprooting that immigrant children can experience. These stages include a silent stage, mixed emotions, excitement or fear, curiosity, culture shock, depression and confusion, assimilation or acculturation, isolation, exhaustion, loneliness (pp. 37-69). A closer look at the means by which Yoon and Unhei interact unveils how they also show traces of these stages. When Unhei tries American names in front of the mirror, she is curious how these may sound and suit her; when both girls find it difficult to make friends, both are lonely and isolated. The silent phase is especially significant in both texts. Yoon and Unhei initially remain silent when they first encounter their new environment, their feelings range from shyness and intimidation to insecurity. However, neither Joey when he takes away Unhei's name jar, nor Yoon's teacher when she presses her to use the English spelling of her name, acknowledge these phases.

Joey interferes with Unhei's arrival in the new school and assumes power over Unhei's establishment of (cultural) identity in front of the class. Being bullied on the bus on the way to school intimidated her and she is reluctant to enter the classroom. She has not met any of her new classmates yet, but a boy with curly hair, Joey, takes her hand, leads her into the classroom and announces 'Here's the new girl!' (Choi, 2001, unpaginated). He takes from her the decision to take these initial steps by herself. Later, Joey removes the name jar from her desk and initiates her approach to introduce herself to the class. He thus undermines her decision-making and does not respect her silence. While Unhei remains rather quiet and reflects the process of naming in privacy, Joey pushes her into what he believes is the right direction and becomes the white male agent. He does not acknowledge her inner and silent struggle to negotiate the identity issues that a change in name would cause nor the time it takes for her to take action herself.

While the final message of the picturebook takes a stand in favour of plurality and resisting certain means of assimilation, its approach can also be seen critically. After school, Joey pays a visit to Unhei's house and returns the name jar. He admits that he took it away because he wanted her to keep her real name. Yet in the process of negotiating ethnic identity and arriving in a new country, the immigrant herself should initiate the act

of naming. Here it is imposed on her by her classmates' ridicule, their inability to pronounce her name, and finally, by Joey stealing the name jar and leaving Unhei no other solution than to make a decision. Moreover, in the scene when the classmates look for the jar, the author does not offer Unhei a voice to express her reaction to the missing jar. She is spoken to or spoken about instead of given a voice to express shock or relief. Her reaction instead is one of hesitation as she only nods and takes a deep breath before she says that she is finally ready to introduce herself. Unhei then writes her name in English and Korean on the chalkboard and, very much like a teacher, shows her classmates how to pronounce it and explains why she likes to keep her name. Interestingly, now that they can say her name, the girl regards her classmates as friends. Furthermore, Joey suggests that Unhei could fill the name jar with Korean nicknames with a good meaning for their classmates. One might suspect that he considers Korean names as play, unserious, funny nicknames on top of American names, while Korean names are reality and part of cultural identity. At the same time, he has his own name stamp made which prints 'Chinku' meaning 'friend'.

In *My Name is Yoon*, the teacher and parents are not willing to provide time to overcome cultural uprooting and to be physically and mentally present in the US. As Yoon et al. (2010) conclude, the picturebook presents a character 'who initially resist[s] assimilating by sustaining [her] own linguistic and cultural identit[y], [but] decide[s] to blend into the dominant culture in the end' (p. 112). Yoon is not able to withstand the pressure from her parents and teacher. They do not admit that:

> (…) people cannot exchange one culture for another in the same way that they exchange commodities. […] Consciously or unconsciously, school professionals tend to transfer the commodity model onto that of culture, believing that children can discard their old cultural values and replace them with new ones as easily as they throw away their old shoes and get a new pair. (Igoa, 1995, p. 44)

From their perspective, Yoon's assimilation to the cultural and linguistic norm (Dionne, 2013, p.40) is successful in disregarding any possibility in which both the Korean and the English spelling of her name could be beneficial, could support pluriliteracy, or be part of a hybrid cultural identity. Both adult groups know what is good for her without

acknowledging Yoon's reservations, which are not given any space in the private and school environment. Fredrickson (1999) explains that 'assimilationist thinking provides intellectual and moral justification for the superiority and unchanging character of the dominant identity and culture' (as cited in Verkuyten, 2009, p. 269). This can also be identified in *My Name is Yoon*, when the teacher does not even show interest in the Korean spelling of Yoon's name, even though Lee (2003) emphasizes the importance of implementing Korean elements in the school environment and encouraging Korean immigrant children to be bicultural, which serves as a 'strong psychological foundation for high self-esteem, pride, and clear identity' (p. 170). Although her father recognizes Yoon's hesitation to print her name in English, he does not ask for reasons.

The picturebooks present a different approach to cultural assimilation. The adults in *My Name is Yoon* follow an ideology in which equity, acceptance and excellence only seem possible to achieve when the immigrant assimilates to the dominant culture while losing aspects of their home culture and language. In *The Name Jar*, the situation is different, because Unhei's mother, her grandmother and also the shopkeeper reassure her that Unhei is a beautiful name and that being different is 'a good thing' (Choi, 2001, unpaginated). Her classmates want her to adopt a name that sounds more American, and one could suspect that her new teacher also favours a new name for Unhei because he does not interfere with his students' approach, but Unhei is able to resist such demands confidently and teach her classmates how to pronounce her name correctly.

Stereotyping and Authenticity

Stereotyping and authenticity are complex issues that require a critical reading of picturebooks. Harada (1995) states that picturebooks about Asian Americans are seen as culturally authentic when they provide 'absence of stereotypes, derogatory language, and parodied speech; accurate illustrations and historical or cultural information and a proactive role of Asian American characters' (in Yoo-Lee, Fowler, Adkins, Kim & Davis, 2014, p. 325). Yet Mo and Shen (1997) emphasize that 'cultural authenticity comprises cultural values, not simply cultural facts' (in Yoo-Lee et al., 2014, p. 86). According to Yoo-Lee et al. (2014), shyness is an often-found personality trait in books about Asian Americans, and also present in the picturebooks. Neither Yoon nor Unhei speak up and

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reveal their discomfort when their names are turned into an issue. Nevertheless, the authors state that stereotypes can sometimes not be avoided, for example:

- that Asian Americans are 'grocery owners', as in *The Name Jar*,

- in view of certain gender roles, for example a 'passiveness/submissiveness' of girls (Yo-Lee et al., p. 338), which is visible in Unhei and Yoon's limited agency, or

- in presenting 'Asians as high achievers and a competitive and hard-working race' (Yo-Lee et al., p. 338), for which the mother in *The Name Jar* serves as an example. When Unhei comes home from the school, the mother asks 'How was school?', but without waiting for an answer immediately adds: 'Did you understand the teacher?' Linguistic understanding is more important than her daughter's experiences and feelings about the new school. This is an attitude which confirms that Korean parents 'regard education as the single most important factor to their children's future success and that accepting a child depends on his or her performance in school' (Lee, 2003, p. 169).

To assess a stereotypical representation of cultural identity and authenticity in both texts, it is worth noting the respective authorship. Yangsook Choi, author of *The Name Jar*, grew up in South Korea and moved to New York City to study art when she was 24 years old (Laib, n.d.). Choi states that she was never teased about anything related to her Korean background when she came to the US, but also admits that people pronounced her name wrongly sometimes. She adopted an American name, Rachel, which she sometimes uses as well. Similar to Unhei, she also had a name stamp and experienced only friendly encounters when she first arrived in New York (Lindal, n.d.). Helen Recorvits is of Polish, Russian and Ukrainian ancestry (Macmillan, n.d.). The illustrator, Gabi Swiatkowska, was born in Poland and immigrated to New York City when she was sixteen. Their biographies do not mention any direct contact with Korean culture or negative experiences with naming. Although Fox and Short (2003) emphasize that a dichotomy of outside/inside with regard to the author's cultural background and the content they write about is too simplistic (p. 4), the selected texts still indicate how an author's experiences could contribute to cultural authenticity.

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Sharing the cultural background of their protagonists does not allow the assumption that the authors' stories are authentic. Being part of a culture does not make authors representatives of that culture (Harris in Fox & Short, 2003, p. 12). For instance, Yokota (1993) assumes that 'being born into a cultural heritage does not give expertise in it if one has essentially lived outside that culture […] others may have been raised within a cultural group, yet have chosen not to identify with it' (p. 159). On the other hand, Recorvits' personal inexperience with the culture does not disqualify her from writing about the culture. As Gates argues, all cultures are accessible if one is willing to engage with the culture and learn about it (as cited in Fox & Short, 2003, p. 12.). However, beyond being knowledgeable about a cultural background, the power dimension and white privilege that underlie cultural appropriation are significant (Fox & Short, 2003, p. 12). While authors of colour are often seen as representatives of their culture and are not allowed to assume other perspectives, this would not be problematic for white authors who are seen as the norm.

In the two examples discussed in this article, it is revealing that the author of Eastern European background creates a protagonist who is first presented as a self-confident but sad Korean girl, who misses her home and does not want to be in the US Toward the end of the story, Yoon develops into an assimilated Americanized girl who is willing and happy to use the English spelling and finally rejects the Korean writing system. Choi, on the other hand, has her protagonist develop the self-esteem to take a stand in front of the class and state her name in both languages, despite initial ridicule. Although one could argue that Recorvits' plot could also be accurate, it is essential to note that accuracy (cultural facts) and authenticity (cultural values) need to be differentiated, as 'a story can be accurate but not authentic by portraying cultural practices that exist but are not part of the central code of culture' (Mo & Shen in Fox & Short, 2003, p. 19). This reveals that beyond cultural background and experiences, the author's imagination, social responsibility and intention add to the discussion of cultural authenticity and, certainly, ideology. What is the ideology behind presenting a Korean immigrant girl who willingly assimilates to US culture and a girl who keeps her name, especially in view of authorship?

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Ideology in *My Name is Yoon* and *The Name Jar*

With reference to Hollindale's framework discussed above, *My Name is Yoon* is explicit about respecting and valuing authorities. Yoon refrains from voicing her discomfort with the new language to either her parents or her teacher. The writer of Eastern European origin presents a Korean child who should trust the authorities, and follow their assimilation model in order to quickly and smoothly arrive in the new country. Quick assimilation is seen as the ultimate goal, disregarding Yoon's hesitation to use English spelling. Her discomfort is not given any space or concern, as her parents only focus on her ability to understand the teacher and follow the lessons. This plot development is in line with Yokota (2009), who states that 'books are still being published that perpetuate misguided beliefs about cultural assimilation – clearly representing the idea that we should be proud when we can 'blend in' with the others (p. 16). On the other hand, readers need to consider that Korean education of children follows a certain value system. For example, Lee (2003) argues that 'students are expected to be passive and compliant' and to 'respect and obey their parents' (p. 169). Even when the American Library Association interprets the story as a transition from a shy to a happy pupil, the explicit statement of accepting newcomers only when they assimilate to the new environment needs to be seen critically. As Smith-D'Arezzo & Musgrove (2011) observe, exposure to such ideology 'over time can work its way into children's belief system' (p. 196, as cited in Yoo-Lee et al., 2014, p. 327).

The Name Jar presents a child protagonist who deals with her classmate's name suggestions on a different level. While the naming situation still makes her feel uncomfortable, Unhei is able to keep her name and has the classmates pronounce it correctly. However, a close reading of the text reveals that Joey was the initial trigger of this self-confident performance, since he stole the name jar in the first place, and thus influenced Unhei's decision-making (see discussion above). The author remains within a frame that allows the boy to assume power over the girl's maintenance of her cultural identity. Yet it could be assumed that Choi does so unconsciously, because she explicitly states that she created 'supportive classmates who were diverse in their opinions so that she [Unhei] faced inner conflict and struggle' (Lindal, n.d.). Choi depicts a female

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protagonist who is able to withstand assimilation, while Recorvits' female protagonist gives in to her teacher and parents' pressure to adapt to the English spelling system.

Both texts could approach assimilation equitably. For example, having some classmates critically reflect upon their inability to pronounce the name of the newcomer, or showing that the newcomer may also have difficulty with the American names that are established as the norm could add a more complex perspective and prevent a one-sided presentation of Unhei's and Yoon's experiences. Since it is likely that difficulty with pronouncing foreign names arises, a more pragmatic and self-confident approach to teaching names in a creative and playful manner could also be possible. For example, Sangoel, a Sudanese refugee boy in *My Name is Sangoel* (Williams & Mohammed, 2009), invents a rebus to teach his name. Despite feeling lonely and uncomfortable in the classroom, Sangoel chooses a progressive method and is successful, as his classmates not only learn to say his name, but they also imitate the rebus and turn it into a game for the whole class.

Potential for the Language Classroom

Teachers can and do use these picturebooks with younger learners in upper primary and older learners in secondary education. For both age groups, reflection tasks could follow a pluriliteracies-based approach. While younger learners reflect upon the processes of naming and diversity in the classroom, secondary school students could investigate processes of assimilation, cultural plurality, and the ideological programme of and in picturebooks and their function in society. Especially given the reality of increasingly multicultural classrooms and societies, it is essential to unveil with students the underlying ideologies entailed in multicultural literature for young readers. Using key terms such as critical cultural awareness, critical media studies, understanding otherness and awareness of alterity, the teaching objectives can be summarized under the umbrella of critical literacy.

Learners from 12 to 18 years of age can reflect upon the role, positioning and character of the protagonists and focus on their development. This supports the development of an awareness that it is not the protagonists' ethnic background that makes them different and/or inferior per se, but rather their discursive positioning as a 'minority'.

When young readers encounter characters of different ethnic backgrounds in literature, it is of utmost importance that they develop such critical understanding.

Enjoying the story with younger learners (10 to 12 years), it could additionally be interesting to reflect upon their own names. They can investigate where their names come from and what meaning is attached to their names. Names often exist in different languages, so they could also explore equivalents to their names in other cultures. Certainly, young EAL learners may elaborate upon this in more detail, whereas EFL learners only have access to basic English. Yet scaffolding can enable young EFL learners to produce short monologues as well.

In the secondary-school language classroom, teachers could guide students in detecting the underlying contexts and ethics, the societal and ideological sub-themes a text entails. The following questions, adapted from Yoon, et al. (2010, 116-117), could be investigated:

- How does *My Name is Yoon* position the Korean girl and the Korean language?
- How does it position the English language and American cultural references?
- Why is Yoon not allowed to use both languages and still be appreciated by teacher and parents?
- How could you change the message in *My Name is Yoon* to promote cultural pluralism?
- Do central characters maintain their identity in the native culture? Does the text support the native culture at the end of the story?
- Does the text promote cultural learning for all students? Which cultural perspectives are provided for which characters and readers?
- Which positions, voices, and interests are at play? Which are silent and absent?
- To what extent do *My Name is Yoon* and *The Name Jar* align with the 'melting pot' theory?
- In what way are the publishing dates of the books significant?

Additionally, an analysis of the interplay of the verbal and visual text can be highly motivating for students. Picturebooks work on different levels, as both text and

illustrations contribute to the meaning of the text in their own specific way. Both can be congruent, but not necessarily, because the illustrations could also add content or tell a different story compared to the verbal text (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006). For students, it can be revealing to uncover that although *The Name Jar* was identified as a text that favours cultural identity, one can ask to what extent it really promotes multiculturalism. Analysing the background, placement and composition of groups of children could support such critical readings, e.g. opening 3 shows the students' positioning on the bus (Choi 2001). Unhei is surrounded by a group of children, who all look at her. One girl points a finger at her and the facial expression of one boy seems rather aggressive. Another girl with darker skin sits alone and apart from the others and watches the scene from the outside. She looks scared and intimidated. The issue of Joey taking action to push Unhei toward choosing a name offers students an intriguing reflection of how certain gender roles are depicted in both books.

Conclusion

Certainly, this analysis cannot be generalized and it refrains from an essentializing perspective. There is broad variety of different texts that refer to immigration processes, which should neither be ignored nor should readers draw conclusions about these based on the reading that this article offers. Yet Luke (1997) emphasizes that when adults and educators offer children multicultural books with a certain cultural context, they need to be aware 'how the public texts of everyday life construct our understanding of the world, and position persons to take up various social, political and cultural identities' (p. 20). As described in this article, the classrooms in *My Name is Yoon* and *The Name Jar* are multicultural and both reflect a multicultural society. Yet a critical reading revealed that the teachers' and classmates' initial approach to the newcomers aims at assimilating them without offering space to contribute to their arrival.

As the discussion of the two example texts has shown, children's books are no longer mere works of imagination. Rather, they have become central media of transmitting certain social norms and political values that the surrounding society, especially the educational and publishing sector, deem positive and worth implementing. One can hardly dispute that 'ideologies [are] embedded in children's literature' (Dionne, 2014: 183).

Discussing selected example texts, this article unveiled that these picturebooks about newcomers and the experiences of immigrant children in school follow an assimilation ideology in which new children need to resist assimilation demands by their school community in order to keep their original names. The trigger for negotiating names and cultural identity often lies with the classmates' ridicule of the respective name and the teacher's non-interference. The new children need to actively withstand the questioning of and pressure to change their names to American standards, which would make it easier for the new community to address them.

On the surface, the picturebooks favour plurality, but only *after* the children either assimilate to the new culture or actively insist on their cultural identity. As Verkuyten (2010) observes: 'assimilation compromises one's ability to live by one's identity and threatens the value and distinctiveness of the group identity. There is not only anecdotal but also systematic evidence for the fact that ethnic minorities tend to see assimilation as identity undermining and threatening' (p. 269). This holds true for both Unhei and Yoon, as has been shown in the analysis above. While the authors' attempt to present plots in which a community accepts immigrant children as they are, a critical reader recognizes that the immigrant children only achieve this after they themselves or through the support of others convince their surroundings of the value of their names. As argued elsewhere (Alter, 2015), it is essential for readers to be able to uncover such positioning and deconstruct the cultural and social implications in texts for young readers.

Despite this critical reading of the picturebooks, these still represent immigrant children's experiences of arrival in the new communities. Both offer immigrant children in English-language classrooms spaces of cultural identity within their new surroundings, and literary spaces which could motivate them to read, as they see themselves represented in the literature of their new home. However, teachers and parents should critically reflect on plot and character development. This is especially the case with *My Name is Yoon*, as one can challenge to what extent it offers a 'visible minorit[y] their rightful place' (Dionne, 2013, p. 46). These books certainly support secondary-school students in thinking critically about the ideologies presented in multicultural picturebooks.

[1] Interestingly, Hollindale does not refer to the body of children's literature in other socialist societies such as the former Soviet Union, the GDR or North Korean, where ideology played a central role in teaching a socialist morality. Kott (2011), Tveritina (2014), Eedy (2014), Dieny (1973), Farquahar (1999) and Richardson (2013) offer further significant insights.

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