Japanese Pronoun Adventure: a Japanese Language Learner's Exploration of His Japanese Gender Pronoun

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JAPANESE PRONOUN ADVENTURE:
A JAPANESE LANGUAGE LEARNER’S EXPLORATION OF
HIS JAPANESE GENDER PRONOUN

A Thesis Presented
By
TAKUMI NAKANO

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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Japanese
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ABSTRACT

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HIS JAPANESE GENDER PRONOUN

SEPTEMBER 2016

TAKUMI NAKANO, B.A., NANZAN UNIVERSITY
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In Japanese, there are various kinds of first-person pronouns, and some of them express the referent’s gender identity. Gender-neutral pronouns are made in English-speaking world day by day, but there is not any common first-person pronoun which indicates the gender identity that positions the referent’s gender somewhere between masculine and feminine. The present paper conducted a life story research on the “Japanese life” of an advanced learner of Japanese at a university in the United States who has been exploring his gender identity by coining and using a new Japanese first-person pronoun 媼 ore, which indicates “in the middle between masculine and feminine.” This new Japanese gender pronoun has enabled the research participant to express his gender identity as he desires to be, and brought the gender non-binary view to the Japanese-speaking world. His invention and usage of the new pronoun has been achieved between two languages, Japanese and Chinese, with the help of his friends. The study also shows the influence of the ideology of gender binary view in the society, which made a gap between his preferred gender expression and actual expression that occurs when he speaks Japanese. Finally, the present study suggests teachers and educational
institutions of Japanese to provide students with environments where they can try out
different identities and expressions before asking them what kind of language user they
aspire to be.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For what purpose do students learn Japanese (or any foreign language), and why am I teaching Japanese to them? This is the first question I had when I started my career as a Japanese teacher. With my heart filled with a lot of expectation and a little nervousness, I, the researcher of the present paper, started teaching Japanese as a teaching assistant while pursuing his Master’s degree at a university in New England, in the United States. Soon after starting teaching, however, I noticed that most of the students who were taking Japanese classes were not majoring in Japanese. The ratio of non-Japanese major students was higher especially at the elementary level, and they were taking the classes to fulfill the general requirements of their Bachelor’s degrees. At about the same time, I met some old friends who once studied Japanese in Japan. Some of them had become surprisingly more fluent in Japanese while others sounded less fluent and hesitant about speaking the language. It was then I felt the reality of the ‘use it or lose it’ concept; that people do forget their foreign language skills if they don’t use them. I wondered, for those who could not maintain their foreign language skills, what was the point of them learning it? They must have spent an enormous amount of time and effort to learn it, but in the end, would it turn out to be a huge waste of time once they forgot it? What, then is the point of teaching Japanese (or any other foreign language in this case) to a large number of people as a general requirement of college in the first place? This question trapped me for a long time.

The question I ask above—the purpose of foreign language education—however, is actually an element which is lacking in Japanese education. Hosokawa (2016) argues
that language classes have become a place to train learners’ communication skills since
the communicative approach was introduced in the late 1970s, without having
discussions on what to do with said skills. In the time of colonialism and national
unification, the political purpose of language education was pretty obvious, but following
those time periods, the alternative purpose of language education became unclear. Thus,
attaining communication skills *per se* has become the purpose, and problems that come
after being able to use the language have been left undiscussed. He criticizes the situation
of Japanese education for confounding the means (=attaining Japanese language skills)
with the end (the goals which Japanese language education should aim for) and argues
that the tendency towards the pursuit of efficient skill learning is the microcosm of the
current economic situation, where the pursuit of profit and efficiency is prioritized.
Furthermore, he argues, it has been unconsciously taken for granted that learners of
Japanese are supposed to become “Japanese,” that is, speak and behave like Japanese
people in spite of the contradicting reality, in which “speaking like a Japanese native”
does not fulfill the requirement for them to obtain Japanese citizenship. What, then,
should the objective of Japanese language education be? What goals should Japanese
language education aim for?
CHAPTER 2

THEORIES AND VISIONS

This chapter first introduces the new possible vision of Japanese language education, *Language Education for the Global Citizen*, discussed by Sato (2015). This is followed by the concept of “metrolingualism,” an idea of language and culture proposed by Otsuji and Pennycook (2009), which conceptually provides the bases *Language Education for the Global Citizen*. After that, the chapter introduces Norton’s (2013) notion of identity and its relationship to societies in the context of language learning.

2-1. Language Education for the Global Citizen

Sato (2015) suggests *Language Education for the Global Citizen (Shakai Sanka wo Mezasu Nihongo Kyoiku, 社会参加をめざす日本語教育)*¹ as the vision for the future educational goals of the Japanese language. He quotes Sato and Kumagai (2011), which defines language education for the global citizen:

*Language education for the global citizen* is a kind of Japanese language education, whose goal is that learners become responsible as a member of the communities² they (want to) belong to. Learners are expected to learn the communities’ rules (e.g. knowledge and norms of language and culture), critically

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¹ Sato adds “community コミュニティ” to the name of the vision later. The title of his speech at the 12th International Conference on Japanese Language Education (ICJLE), which was held in 2014, was “Shakai · Community Sanka wo Mezasu Nihongo Kyoiku” 社会・コミュニティ参加をめざす日本語教育.
² The term “communities” refer to not only local communities but also a broad range of communities, from personal to public, small to large, and both online and offline. Some of them are fixed, and others are fluid and spontaneous and have unclear boundaries.
consider, negotiate with, and be negotiated by them in order to choose either to inherit or to try to change the rules, not simply accept them. (Sato, 2015, p. 6)³

Sato and Kumagai (2011) base this vision on three conceptual categories:

1. Society/community is necessary because one cannot express the self, using language if another who faces them, does not exist.
2. Society/community is where self-realization is implemented and then acknowledged. Therefore, society/community is necessary to achieve self-realization.
3. Every member of a society/community has to bear some responsibility of improving it. (Sato, 2015, p. 6)

Language education for the global citizen attaches importance to learners’ self-realization. To incorporate this vision, Sato argues, teachers are supposed to think about questions with learners such as “what do you want to do with the language?” and “what

³ It has been more than 45 years since Freire (1970) criticized the ‘banking education’ model. He coined the term banking education to refer to the unilateral flow of knowledge from teacher to students. In this style of education, the teacher’s task is to talk to and bestow students with as much knowledge as possible, and the students’ task is to receive, memorize, and repeat the knowledge patiently. Freire compares it to banking: the teacher is the one who deposits money, and the students are the bank. This is based on the ideology in which the teacher is regarded as the absolute authority (the knower) while students are regarded as totally ignorant beings (information seekers). This denies the students’ pre-existing knowledge and treats them as passive objects. In the context of Japanese language education, the concept of banking education can be extended to the power relationship between Japanese and non-Japanese people or between native speaker and non-native speaker of Japanese. As briefly discussed in the introduction, non-Japanese people and non-native speakers of Japanese have often been expected to passively learn what Japanese society, language, and culture should be, and to become “Japanese” (this kind of fixed view of the relationship between Japanese people/native speakers of Japanese as the knower and the learners of Japanese as the knowledge receiver is even found in Japanese language textbooks, as Kumagai (2014) points out. However, language education for the global citizen incorporates learners of Japanese into the process of considering what Japanese society, language, and culture should be, as one independent member. Therefore, in this vision, learners of Japanese are expected to critically consider the knowledge and the norms of Japanese language and culture before accepting them.
kind of language user do you aspire to be?” Another question is: “with whom and for what [purpose] do you communicate?” These questions give learners more specific purposes to learn their target language rather than simply “being good at Japanese” and such.

Along with the questions above, Language Education for the Global Citizen emphasizes learners’ participation and contribution to the societies/communities that they (want to) belong to. This is important in the following two points. First, by owing some responsibility to the societies/communities, learners can get out of the state of being a “guest” of the societies/communities, which is equal to “outsider.” It gives learners agency and enables them to belong more closely to their desired societies/communities. Second, this vision largely expects learners to effect social transformation. According to Otsuji (2015, p. 21), Sato believes that “Japanese education can influence nations, societies, various communities, related fields, academic fields, schools, and all kinds of groups, not only be influenced by them,” and he emphasizes the importance of “change through Japanese education.” The author of the present paper recognizes this big vision, which goes beyond what Hosokawa (2016) described as the pursuit of efficient skill learning and as what the objective of Japanese language education should aim at as a whole.

2-2. Metrolingualism

Language Education for the Global Citizen is based on metrolingualism, which considers language as a hybrid that is both fixed and fluid. Sato (2015) critiques
“plurilingualism” and “pluriculturalism” proposed by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) regarding the following three points. First, plurilingualism and pluriculturalism regard languages and cultures as fixed objects, not as something learners can construct or transform. Its implied assumption is that there are fixed, standard languages and cultures, and that learners are just expected to choose, combine, and/or make use of them. Therefore, he argues, there is no space in plurilingualism and pluriculturalism for discussions on the learner’s agency, or right to actively construct their target languages and cultures.

Plurilingualism and pluriculturalism are, Sato adds, often understood as the diversity of language and culture on a micro (personal) level, while multilingualism and multiculturalism are associated with a macro (society, community) level diversity. However, this understanding disconnects society, community, and individual, and thus it fails to explain the interrelation between them.

Second, there is no critical discussion on the boundaries of languages and cultures. Plurilingualism and pluriculturalism focus on learning languages and cultures, and it lacks the critical aspect of how “a” certain language or culture is recognized as an

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4 According to the Council of Europe, plurilingualism “refers to the repertoire of varieties of language which many individuals use, and is therefore the opposite of monolingualism; it includes the language variety referred to as ‘mother tongue’ or ‘first language’ and any number of other languages or varieties. Thus, in some multilingual areas, some individuals are monolingual and some are plurilingual.” On the other hand, multilingualism “refers to the presence in a geographical area, large or small, of more than one ‘variety of language;’ i.e. the mode of speaking of a social group whether it is formally recognized as a language or not; in such an area individuals may be monolingual, speaking only their own variety.”
(http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Division_EN.asp)
individual. Sato contends that recognizing an individual language or culture is “not self-evident, but rather arbitrary” and “very political.”

Third, Sato doubts if simply accepting diversity is enough or not. He argues that this “accepting diversity” vision lacks an explanation of how to communicate with other different individuals or groups of people and how to choose one from a number of different senses of value when one has to achieve their goal.

To answer these problems about the CEFR’s plurilingualism and pluriculturalism policy, Sato adopts the concept of metrolinguism. Metrolinguism was coined by Otsuji and Pennycook (2009) to replace the terminology such as multilingualism, multiculturalism, and cosmopolitanism. It can be understood as these three aspects: (1) a view of language and culture, (2) practice, and (3) space.

2-2-1. Metrolingual View of Language and Culture

A metrolingual approach is based on the critical interrogation of boundaries of languages and those of cultures. This approach regards language and culture as a single hybrid, doubting boundaries made arbitrarily to separate it into multiple categories, while plurilingualism and multilingualism view language and culture as an assembly of multiple languages and cultures that are fixed and a priori. (Sato, 2015) In metrolinguism, boundaries of languages and cultures are considered to be made from the social, political, and historical power relations that are changing through time. Therefore, metrolinguism does not totally deny the fixation of language and culture. Language and culture are both fixed and fluid, and the approach heavily focuses on the interaction between their fixation and fluidity. (See figure 1.)
1. Metrolingualism as a view of language/culture: language/culture is **hybrid**, and both **fixed** and **fluid**.

Figure 1. Metrolingualism as a view of language/culture\(^5\)

\(^5\) The original picture of the figure, *Hebi no Kaiten*, was created by Akiyoshi Kitaoka, and the artwork is on his website. The author of the present paper has permission to cite the artwork with his words and figures on it.

2-2-2. Metrolingual Practice and Space

Otsuji & Pennycook (2009) explain that metrolinguism views language and culture both as practice and as a space for language practice. This observation emerges from the interaction between two views: a view of language and culture as being fixed and standard, and that of being fluid, dynamic, and hybrid. (See figure 2.) Otsuji (2011) demonstrates metrolingual practices and spaces emerging in a community. She recorded conversations and conducted interviews in an Australian company where native and non-native speakers of Japanese work and speak both Japanese and English. On the one hand, the observations and interviews show that workers have a complex consciousness of language and cultural boundaries. The research participants talked with each other, frequently code-switching between Japanese and English. One of them mentioned that she did not like to be simply judged by her ethnicity. (These are the fluid, dynamic, and hybrid aspects of language.) On the other hand, the research participants have an essentialistic understanding of language and culture. The research participants discussed stereotypes of French people and language. One of them said that girls speaking French were cute and others talked about French people’s smell. (These are the fixed and standard aspects of language and culture.) From this data, Otsuji regards the workplace as an example of metrolingual space, where there is a fixed and normative view of language and culture, and where there is a fluid, dynamic, and hybrid view of language and culture. Otsuji also shows another case, in which three native speakers of English talk with each other in both English and Japanese, frequently code-switching although there was no native speaker of Japanese involved in the conversation. According to Otsuji, the speakers added a language that has nothing to do with their ethnicity nor the country
where they live into their repertoire of communication. The research also shows the case of a Turkish-Australian worker, who distances himself from both his Turkish and Australian ethnicity and culture and seeks his new identity as a speaker of Japanese. Otsuji also describes how he challenges the concept of “standard Japanese,” by stopping using polite expressions to his boss, and how that attempt succeeded in constructing a new relationship with the boss.

Metrolingualism was created from Otsuji and Pennycook’s reflection on enumerative terms such as multilingualism, plurilingualism, and polylingualism because their carefree celebration of multiplicity caused the tendency “to pluralise languages and cultures rather than complexify them.” (Otsuji and Pennycook, 2009, p. 243)

Metrolingualism is a practice to produce new “language” from the interaction between the idea of fixed and standard languages and that of fluid and hybrid language, and the space where new “language” emerges is also seen as metrolingual space. (Otsuji 2011).
Figure 2. Metrolingualism as practice and as space\textsuperscript{6}

\textsuperscript{6} See footnote #5.
2-3. Identity and Language Learning

2-3-1. The concept of identity

Next, this chapter of my thesis introduces Norton’s (2013) notion of identity, which is also important to the present study. (What Norton refers to as “identity” includes everything from race to ethnicity to gender to sexuality depending on each context, but “identity” mentioned in the study of the present paper refers to gender identities due to the focus of the research conducted). Norton related each individual’s identity with their communities. She conceptualized identity as “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future.” This is different from a conventional idea of identity, in which one’s identity is considered single, fixed, and sorely determined by the person themselves.

While humanist conceptions of the individual presuppose that every person has an essential, unique, fixed and coherent core, poststructuralism depicts the individual (i.e. the subject) as diverse, contradictory, dynamic and changing over historical time and social space. Drawing on the Foucauldian notions of discourse and historical specificity, subjectivity in poststructuralism is understood as discursively constructed and as always socially and historically embedded. Further, as Weedon notes, identity is constituted in and through language. By extension, every time language learners speak, read or write the target language, they are not only exchanging information with members of the target language community, they are also organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. As such, they are engaged in identity construction and negotiation. (location. 199)

Therefore, how learners express themselves, how they communicate with others, and their sense of who they are (= identity) are not solely determined by their internal personality. Learners may have multiple different identities depending on which
community they are a part of, and they may co-exist simultaneously and be contradictory to each other. The identities may even change through time. For example, a transman may identify himself as feminine, as his family assumes or expects him to be, but gradually find it uncomfortable, and conflicting with the gender he desires to identify himself as (= masculine). Supporting Norton’s notion on identity, the present study recognizes the multiplicity and fluidity of the language learner’s identities, and most of all, the study emphasizes the inseparability of their identities from the communities they belong to.

2-3-2. Preceding Studies on Identity

The current chapter introduces two recent studies on identity in the field of Japanese language education. The research method used in both studies is also used in the present paper, and it is explained in detail in the next chapter.

2-3-2-1. “Split Japanese”

Chung (2010) found the problem of “split Japanese” (nibunka sareta Nihongo 分化された日本語) through the life history research7 of a Korean advanced learner of Japanese. In the form of an interview, Chung lets the learner tell her “Japanese life” (Nihongo jinsei, 日本語人生), from the time when she started to study Japanese to what

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7 Chung (2010, p. 1) calls her research life history (LH) research instead of life story (LS) research. The distinction between the definition of LH and that of LS is not standardized among researchers, but they are similar in that both of them aim at analyzing the meaning of interviewees’ LH/LS, while oral history utilizes interview as a part of objective historical materials.
her life was like after going to Japan. The learner also explains how she communicates in Japanese, and what she felt on those experiences. The study shows a dilemma which the interviewee has had since she became an advanced learner of Japanese and started living in Japan. She had always been studying Japanese very hard, aiming at being able to “speak Japanese like the Japanese of Japanese people.” However, the more she learned the language, the more she felt that she cannot express herself well. Even when she wanted to express herself more freely, she ended up using fixed form expressions (e.g. *Tsumaranai mono desu ga* つまらないものですが when giving a gift to a Japanese person) because she believed that they were the best expressions to maintain good relationships with Japanese people. In turn, this feeling of constraint made her feel that her Japanese was not good enough and not improving as fast as it used to be. Using colors as metaphor, she describes her feelings, saying that even though she wants to express her “rainbow colors” in front of Japanese people, she can express only a limited number of colors. She also describes her feelings as “putting herself into the mold of Japanese.”

From the interviews, Chung found that the learner always regards “the Japanese of Japanese people” (*Nihonjin no Nihongo* 日本人の日本語) as the best Japanese, and feels that there is a distance between that and the Japanese she speaks. Chung refers to the dichotomy of two Japanese languages as “split Japanese,” and the dichotomy created here is also understood as split identities.

This “split Japanese” reflects the interviewee’s split identities: The identity that she actually wishes to express—rainbow colors—is restrained while talking with Japanese people due to her believing that “speaking and behaving like the Japanese
people do”—a common ideology—is best. Instead, she expresses her alternative identity, which has been assimilated into Japanese society, by using “the Japanese of Japanese people.” Therefore, Japanese society is virtually making her replace her desired identity with a Japanese identity. Pointing out the social situation that expects learners of Japanese to pursue “the Japanese of Japanese people,” Chung argues the need to have a sense of “my Japanese” (watashi no Nihongo 私の日本語)\(^8\), with which each learner of Japanese can express themselves in the way they desire to, and which they can use for their own sake, not the sake of the Japanese people.

2-3-2-2. The Illusion of Japan’s Ethnic Homogeneity and Language

Tanaka (2011) studied the complex identities of a zainichi Korean\(^9\) teacher of Japanese, and more specifically, how zainichi Korean people (who are not ethnically Japanese but are native speakers of Japanese), strategically position themselves in the context of Japanese language education, where (like Chung’s study) the “Japanese of Japanese people” tends to be considered the goal of education. The interviewee was born, raised, and lived in Japan until the age of 31, at which point she “went back” to South Korea with her Korean husband (he was studying abroad in Japan when they met) due to his business. Since she once had to give up her dream of becoming a teacher of English in Japan due to her nationality, she expected South Korea to accept her will and effort. However, people treated her coldly when she moved to South Korea in 1979. This is because the Japanese language was still strongly associated with Japan’s colonization of

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\(^8\) Chung also used “Japanese of self” (jibun no Nihongo 自分の日本語) interchangeably.

\(^9\) An ethnic Korean resident of Japan.
the Korean Peninsula. Due to the quandary of rejection by Korean society, as well as that by Japan too, she could not identify herself as Korean. Additionally, she does not even identify herself as zainichi Korean, considering the diverse situations among zainichi Korean people. In daily life, therefore, she feels uncomfortable to simply be categorized as zainichi Korean and has a skeptical attitude toward the categorization. However, when she teaches Japanese, she strongly expresses her zainichi identity. In Japanese language education, the identity of zainichi—which means that she is a native speaker of Japanese—is her weapon to differentiate herself from other Korean teachers of Japanese, who are not native speakers. Otherwise, since her ethnicity is Korean and she has a Korean name, people see her as being no different from other Korean teachers (she cannot be an example of “a successful learner” because she is a native speaker of Japanese). Being a native speaker solely protects her in the job market in her field. On the one hand, she recognizes the need for diverse Japanese, not only “Japanese of Japanese people,” but on the other hand, she confessed that she had even thought of changing her nationality from Korean to Japanese to assimilate her ethnicity, native language, and nationality.

Tanaka first expected her interviewee to give her an insight that facilitates the transformation of the “Japanese language nationalism” (kokugo nationalism 国語ナショナリズム), the norm of the concordance of “Japanese people = Japanese language.” Instead, however, she found the interviewee participating in the “Japanese language nationalism” in order to protect herself. Tanaka argues that this reflects the strong power of the “Japanese people = Japanese language” norm. She argues for a reconsideration of
the current view of the Japanese language to accept and include more diverse speakers of Japanese.

2-3-2-3. Vacillating View of Language and Identity

What Chung (2010) and Tanaka (2011) represent are vacillating views of language and the identity of non-native speakers of Japanese. In Chung’s work (2010), the learner wishes to use “my Japanese” (watashi no Nihongo), which metrolingualism identifies as the fluidity of language, while she constantly pursues Japanese of native speakers. This, in her mind, is conceived as the best, fixed goal. Her mind is vacillating between a fluid view of language and a fixed one. This can also be understood as her identity conflict. By pursuing good relationships and smooth communication with Japanese people, she is distancing her identity, speaking like Japanese people (= being like Japanese people), from her preferred identity, which she describes as “rainbow colors.”

Similarly, in Tanaka (2011), the interviewee, who is a Korean teacher of Japanese recognizes the need for diverse Japanese, but she chooses to show the “nativeness” of her Japanese in teaching, helplessly adopting the norm of the supremacy of native speakers’ Japanese. In the context of Japanese language teaching, influenced by the industry’s expectations, she cannot help choosing her identity as a native speaker of Japanese. Furthermore, she even considers changing her nationality in order to obtain the identity of a Japanese person.

Both Chung and Tanaka’s cases show that identities can be fluid, multiple, and may contradict each other. The studies also show that one’s identities are not solely determined by their preference. Rather, identities are formed and understood through the
relationships with the communities they belong to. In addition, the interviewees’ view of Japanese vacillates between fluidity (my Japanese, diverse Japanese) and fixation (Japanese spoken by Japanese people/native speakers of Japanese). Both cases also show how one’s view of language is influenced by the society as strongly as their identities are.

2-3-3. Gender Identities

As mentioned earlier, the present paper conducted research on gender identity, among all the many kinds of identities. Gender identity refers to one’s social identity within a set of gender categories according to the society to which the person belongs. Most societies have long been considered gender a binary category, consisting of either the masculine or feminine. However, this gender-binary view has been steadily changing towards a non-binary gender view, which puts masculinity on one side and femininity on the other side, and recognizes instead a spectrum between the two ends, rather than putting a distinctive boundary in-between (therefore, it is common to use the terms such as “gender non-binary” or “gender neutral” when identifying oneself as falling somewhere between masculinity and femininity. The lexicon is still expanding; the definitions of these terms are still unstable, and thus the present paper is limited to describing gender identities “between masculine and feminine” as “gender non-binary” and “gender neutral.”)

Along with this ideological change in gender in the current English-speaking world, new third-person singular gender-neutral pronouns (e.g. “ze,” “hir,” and “they”) are invented almost daily, and the legitimatization of the use of the pronouns can be controversial, involving institutions such as colleges, companies, and governments.
In Japanese, the most common masculine pronouns are 俺 ore and 僕 boku. 僕 ore is considered to be more masculine and impolite. In contrast, while there is a feminine pronoun あたし atashi, 私 watashi is more commonly used. 私 watashi is considered to be a pronoun available to both masculine and feminine speakers, and thus it is generally described as a “gender-neutral” pronoun, albeit the present paper will later raise questions about its neutrality in later chapters.

As the view of gender identity shifts from a simple binary to a more complex spectrum, it is not difficult to suppose that sexual orientation will also become more diverse and complex, and thus the terminology surrounding sexual orientation will expand as well. While it is important to study the diversity of sexual orientation, it will not be covered in the present study.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH QUESTION

Lead by the theories and concepts represented in the previous chapter, the present paper recognizes the validity of studies on Japanese language learners who explore their new identities in Japanese, their target language. Just like people in the English-speaking world explore the gender pronoun which fits them the best, when Japanese language learners speak Japanese or become a member of Japanese-speaking communities, they may wonder what kind of gender they want to identify themselves as, or what kind of gender pronoun in Japanese can possibly fit them the best. Although Japanese has many pronouns compared to English, this does not mean that the learners can easily choose one that fits them best. As metrolingualism suggests, learners may invent a new language (a new pronoun in this case), or re-conceptualize a pre-existing one and use it differently than people already do.

In late 2014, the researcher of the present paper met an advanced Japanese learner who has been trying to express his gender identity with a new Japanese first-person pronoun he coined, 媺 ore (note that the radical of the kanji is not ninben 亁 but onnnahen 女). The learner has had complex thoughts and feelings about his own gender identity and its expression, and he has been exploring a Japanese pronoun that fits his gender identity. His answer to this pronoun conundrum was to make his own Japanese pronoun. The pronoun and this learner’s idea about it caught this researcher’s interest, and thus I decided to conduct a case study on the new Japanese gender pronoun he invented and its meanings to him, using the following research question as a guide:
How and why did the Japanese language learner make a new Japanese pronoun based on his gender identity? What may the learner be considering when he adopted this usage and what may he be feeling by making and using the pronoun?
CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH METHOD

The research method the present study adopts is called life story (LS) research. Although LS research does not have a long history in the field of Japanese language education, the present paper adopts it because the research method has a high affinity for studying one’s identity, and this researcher considered the method suitable to represent a case study of an individual. Before representing the research participant and the research that the present paper has conducted, the current chapter starts from the point of view of explaining what ‘life story research’ is as well as its epistemological framework, purposes, and validity to the present study.

4-1. Epistemological Framework

Life story (LS) research is a research method which is used to study one’s experience and how the person views it—mainly by means of interviewing the person—along with some other personal textual materials such as letters, diaries, and autobiographies as needed, focusing on understanding their subjective meaning. Sakurai and Kobayashi (2005) divided LS research into two approaches when considering an epistemological framework: interpretational objectivism approach and interactional constructivism approach.\(^\text{10}\) Although the present study adopted only the latter, interactional constructivism approach, the next paragraph briefly explains about

\(^{10}\) Translated by the author of the present paper, the original term is kaishaku-teki kyakkan-shugi approach and taiwa-teki kochiku-shugi approach.
interpretational objectivism approach in order to give a better explanation of interactional constructivism approach by comparing the two approaches.

The interpretational objectivism approach aims at inductively discovering social reality from the accumulation of life stories. It makes a hypothesis of normative and institutional reality from a life story and then modifies or reconstructs the hypothesis by taking another life story into account. By repeating the process of adding more LSs, the approach aims at a state of “saturation,” that is, finding the same pattern from every LS sample and requiring no more LS to explain a certain normative and institutional reality. This kind of approach is called a ‘realistic approach,’ because the existence of normative and institutional reality is the premise of LS formation. In other words, the approach assumes that a normative and institutional reality originally exists, and it produces LSs. The realistic approach dates back to an idea from the age of enlightenment that there is a single unwavering reality beyond the existence of researcher or observer. The approach considers the method of gathering as many samples as possible as the established “correct” scientific method (the extension of this idea is positivistic approach, represented by the Chicago School). Therefore, the realistic approach may even regard LS research, which has the practical limitation of the number of samples and focuses on individual’s subjective world, as “un-scientific.” (Sakurai and Kobayashi, 2005)

In contrast to the interpretational objectivism approach, the interactional constructivism approach challenges the dogmatic premise of “the only reality.” This approach identifies realities as dynamically constructed among people through languages (in reverse, since people use languages when they construct realities, the construction also has linguistic restriction). Therefore, the object of the approach’s study is not only
“what is told in LS” but also “how the LS is told.” Furthermore, since interlocutors engage in LS interviews using language, they cannot evade reality construction, and thus the interlocutors need to situate themselves in their LS research. Therefore, the interactional constructivism approach regards the LS interview as a story in which the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee constructs “here and now”11 (Sakurai and Kobayashi, 2005). The present study uses Sakurai’s interactional constructivism approach. The next section reviews the history of LS research in Japanese language education and discusses the validity of the research method. (See figure 3.)

11 Sakurai repeatedly emphasizes in his works (2002, 2012, Sakurai and Kobayashi, 2005) that a reality is constructed in a particular time and space, using this sign: ＜いま—ここ＞
This whole process is regarded as a life story co-constructed “here and now.”

- The researcher’s perception (categorization) of the interviewee. (e.g. student, non-native speaker of Japanese, etc.)
- The researcher’s expectations on this research
- The interviewee’s perception (categorization) of the researcher. (e.g. teacher, Japanese, etc.)
- The interviewee also thinks how the researcher is perceiving (categorizing) them.

**Place and Time**

**Analyse**

**Researcher (interviewer)**

**Interviewee**

**How** the interviewee speaks is taken into account in analysis
- Laugh, cry, be angry, etc.
- Gestures
- Pause
- Silence
- Tones of voice, etc.

**Figure 3. Interactional constructivism approach**
4-2. Validity and Purposes of LS Research in Japanese Language Education

Miyo (2014) argues that LS research has been accepted in the field of Japanese language education since a little more than ten years ago, when qualitative research methods, such as ethnography and grounded research methods, were highly discussed in the field during the paradigm shift from modernism to post-modernism in the humanities. At about the same time, Japanese language education was aiming at establishing themselves as a firm study field (Nihongo kyoiku gaku 日本語教育学), and thus it was also seeking new “scientific” research methods. Therefore, the adoption of LS research can be interpreted both as the story of this so-called “social turn,” and as the story of academic independence. According to Miyo, “identity” has been the key to the development of LS research in Japanese language education. He argues that “LS research is effective as a method to approach something very subjective such as identity,” and that “in reverse, it is the important characteristic of LS research in Japanese language education, in which most LS researchers study relationships between identity and language education or acquisition.” The author of this paper emphasizes Miyo’s argument here as the proof of LS research as a valid method for the present study, and as the reason to position the present study within the field of Japanese language education.

Miyo (2014) also discusses the purposes of LS study, which focuses on the subjective meaning of interviewees such as learners and teachers. He divided the purposes into the following two points:

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12 Miyo also notes that it is difficult to say that LS is completely subjective if it is regarded as something co-constructed by interviewer and interviewee.
1. To propose theories that contribute to Japanese language education
2. To record the research participants’ LSs (p. 4)

The purpose of the first point—to propose theories that contribute to Japanese language education—aims to make suggestions for Japanese language education, from class activities to teacher trainings. LS can be utilized to re-consider the concept of a “good teacher,” “good learner,” and a “good class” by introducing the subjective perspectives of the people who actually engage in learning and/or teaching Japanese. Meanwhile, the purpose of point two (to record the research participants’ LSs) lays emphasis on collecting and storing LSs from which future researchers can learn, rather than making theoretical suggestions to the field of study based on the LSs.\(^\text{13}\)

For the purpose of point one, Miyo admits its efficiency, but simultaneously argues that it is sometimes better to leave the process of interpretation of each LS to its readers, pointing it out that the abundant meanings which LS contain seem to fade away through the process of theorization. As explained above, the interactional constructivism approach views LS as a product in which interviewer and interviewee both play a part in the construction of the story. Following this notion, for the purpose of point two, Miyo emphasizes the importance of including the researchers’ reflection on the process of listening to and analyzing LS into their studies. He argues that describing the researchers’ experiences can be resources for readers, who are probably also those who work in the field of Japanese language education, although this kind of reflectional, self-referential process can be painful to the researchers. Moreover, he believes that “Japanese language

\(^{13}\) There is not a distinct boundary between the two purposes, and thus some LS studies can have both purposes.
education” can stand as an independent field of study (i.e. “gaku の” of Nihongo kyoiku gaku 日本語教育学), rather through the process of sharing the “resources” than by establishing a certain methodology.

In this sense, even regardless of theorization, the author of the present study believes that the present study contributes to other educators of Japanese, and by extension, the field of Japanese language education as a whole. Indeed, through listening to the LS of the Japanese language learner, the research participant, the present paper asked the participant who he wants to be when he speaks Japanese and how he wants to live with the Japanese pronoun he created through his life. Since these considerations are the extension of the questions “what do you want to do with Japanese?” and “what kind of Japanese user do you aspire to be?”, the present study regards itself as one resource for language education for the global citizen in practice.

4-3. Research Participant

The research participant of the present study (LS research) is a 21-year old American, who is an advanced learner of Japanese and who speaks English as his first language. He started teaching himself Japanese right before he entered high school in 2008. He started going to a private Japanese language school near his home in the same year, and he studied Japanese there every weekend throughout high school. He also studied in Japan for six weeks during the summer break before he started his senior year of high school. He entered a university in New England in 2012, majoring in Japanese and linguistics. During the summer break in 2013, between his freshman and sophomore
years, he studied in Japan again for ten weeks. He passed the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) N2\(^\text{14}\) in 2015, when he was a senior in university.

It was when the research participant had just started his junior year in fall 2014, that the researcher met him for the first time. (See figure 4.) The researcher met him in a class in which the researcher was also a participant. This resulted in sharing some courses throughout the next two years at the university, until the research participant graduated from the university. Although the researcher was a teaching assistant of the elementary and intermediate Japanese language classes, as well as a graduate student of the university’s Japanese program, the researcher did not teach the classes while he was taking them, and thus the relationship between the researcher and the participant was never that of teacher and student directly. Rather, the researcher and the participant were classmates and became friends through taking the same classes for two years by chance. This is also a part of the reason why the researcher asked him to cooperate in the present study as a research participant. Since the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee is one of the fundamental factors which determines what LS would be like, the researcher presumed that an interviewee (language learner) probably has more difficulty telling their LS if the interviewer (the researcher, in this case) is their teacher.\(^\text{15}\)

\(^{14}\) The JLPT is administered as a series of five levels, N5 being the lowest, and N1 being the highest. N2 requires “the ability to understand Japanese used in everyday situations, and in a variety of circumstances to a certain degree.” (http://www.jlpt.jp/e/about/levelsummary.html)

\(^{15}\) The research participant did not categorize the researcher as a teacher from the beginning. This is supported by the fact that he started using his new pronoun 娘 ore to the researcher without any explanation. (Refer to the subchapter 5-4 “Ore and Politeness” in the LS for detail.)
The research participant had complex thoughts and feelings about his own gender identity and its expression for a long time, and therefore he explored the possibility of creating a Japanese pronoun that best fits his gender identity since he started studying Japanese at the age of fourteen. As the researcher got to know the participant better and came to communicate with him more often, the researcher noticed that he uses “ore,” the Japanese masculine pronoun to refer to himself in casual conversation. At about same time, the researcher also noticed that the research participant uses 僶, not 僆, in his written Japanese, including texts and emails. At that time, the researcher simply wondered what the character he had just used is and why he used it instead of 僆. This is the very beginning of the researcher’s interest in the questions of this study.

4-4. Interviews and Other Materials.

This research consists mainly of two interviews. The first interview was conducted in April 2016, when he was a senior student, and the interview was approximately four hours long. The second interview was conducted in July 2016, after he graduated from the university, in order to ask for clarifications of the first interview. Besides the interviews, the interviewee and the researcher continuously communicated with each other both face-to-face and via private messaging for sharing thoughts and making more

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16 More details of his gender identity will be explained in the research below, but at this point, keep in mind that he identifies himself as being in the middle between masculine and feminine.
17 The character 僆 is pronounced ore, and it is a masculine first-person pronoun in Japanese. The character 僆 did not exist in Japanese until the research participant started using it. He pronounces it ore just like 僆, and uses it as a first-person pronoun when he refers to himself.
clarifications throughout the entire research. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Massachusetts Amherst did not regard the interviews of the present study as a research that requires their institutional review. However, as Sakurai (2012, chap. 10) discusses, the IRB cannot adequately protect the research participants’ agency, human rights, privacy, and so on in this sort of research. In addition, it is sometimes difficult for interviewees to fully understand the purpose of the LS research before being interviewed due to the open-ended characteristics of the LS research. Research questions may be developed and revised through the process of interviewing, and thus even informed consent can be unclear. Therefore, Sakurai claims that as well as the IRB’s inspection, it is also necessary for LS researchers to take situational and relativistic approaches to research ethics even after the institutional review. In consideration of this characteristic of LS research, the researcher communicated frequently with the interviewee throughout and after the present study in order to always make the research as clear as possible. This communication will continue into the future as well because there is no expiration date of one’s privacy.

The first interview took place at night in a lounge in a building where the University’s Japanese program is located. The research participant chose the place because he was familiar with it, and the lounge is usually quiet at night. There was no one

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18 What Sakurai is arguing here is that IRB is a requisite condition, but it is not a sufficient condition for LS research.
19 The researcher also asked the interviewee to check the drafts of the present paper so that the interviewee could know what was going to be publicly available and ask the researcher not to reveal some parts of the interview if he desires so. Through this process, the interviewee told the researcher not to directly quote but instead summarize a certain part of the interview because he thought it too personal. In addition, this process helped the researcher to avoid a strained interpretation of the LS and to refine his understanding.
else present at that time of the interview, and thus he and the researcher did not have to worry about other people overhearing it. Both the researcher and the research subject sat on couches and talked while drinking tea. The researcher made a concerted effort to ensure that the interviewee was relaxed during the interview. In order to listen to the story of ですore more holistically, along with the interviewee's life in relation to Japanese, the researcher borrowed “Japanese life,” the term Chung (2010) used, and asked the interviewee, “Please tell me about your life in relation to Japanese,” or your “Japanese life,” as well as the pronoun ですore (onnnahen no ですore): that is, how you found it and use it in communication.” The interview itself was conducted in both English and Japanese, freely switching from one to the other since it is the most comfortable for the interviewee. The second interview was conducted through a Web video chat at night when the interviewee was at his home. In the second interview, the researcher asked the interviewee about some questions emerged from the first interview. The researcher took some notes during both of the interviews for his transcriptions and analysis later.

The interviews were transcribed. Before the transcription, the researcher discussed pseudonyms on the transcriptions and the present paper with the interviewee. We have decided that his name is represented as Mathew in the texts, and that the third-person pronoun in English that is used to refer to him is always “he.” The names of all of the other people who appear in his LS are also pseudonyms. There is not strict rules for LS transcription, but the present study used the following rules based on Sakurai (2012, p. 135-8). Since the transcriptions are quite long, only the parts of the interview that the researcher considered important to relate the participant’s life story are quoted and summarized in the present paper.
• Mathew’s utterances start with: M:
• The researcher’s utterances start with: R:
• Simultaneous utterance: [[
• Overlapping: // (inserted within sentence)
• Silence: . (One period represents a silence of about one second.)
• Unintelligible: X
• Period: . or  represents to the end of a sentence.
• Comma: , or  represents a pause and a breathing point.
• Question: ?
• Laugh: *laugh* or (笑)
• Omission: [...]  
• Explanation of the situation: (( )) (Non-verbal expressions of the interviewee and the researcher are included.)
• Other explanation: ( )

As supplemental material, Mathew also provided the researcher with three chat logs and a thesis. The chat logs are conversations about the interviewee’s gender identity, representation, and pronoun, made between him and his friends through a social network’s message service. He and the friends were close enough to talk about each other’s personal matters such as their gender identities and sexualities. The chats are dated between November 2014 and February 2016. The people Mathew has conversed with are also all represented with pseudonyms: Ian, Leah, and Daniel. Mathew also provided the undergraduate thesis of Rachael Johnson (the author currently works as an art educator). The thesis is a 68-page-long graphic novel about the author’s identity exploration and titled I Used to Be Somebody. (Johnson, 2015) These supplemental materials listed above, chat logs, and the thesis were provided by the interviewee prior to the first interview, saying that they were important to understand the story he was going to tell, and he mentioned the chat logs and the thesis during the
interview. Therefore, the researcher adopted them as supplemental materials for his study.\textsuperscript{20} The following is the list of materials used as the data for the present study.

1. Two interviews (4 hours and 30 minutes total, field notes taken during the interviews)
2. Chat logs of the conversations made between Mathew and his friends (Ian, Leah, and Daniel)
3. The graphic novel (undergraduate thesis) \textit{I Used to Be Somebody}

The following figure is the overview of the present research project. The next chapter represents the LS which the present study conducted.

\textsuperscript{20} Sakurai and Kobayashi (2005) discusses letters, diaries, and autobiographies as examples of textual materials to be studied along with interviews in LS research. However, through the rapid development of the computers and the Internet, the younger generation nowadays uses new communication measures such as social network services (SNS), blogs, messaging, and video chat by far more often than letters. Similarly, even diaries and autobiographies can be written in the form of comics, or SNS or blog post, which can include pictures, videos, and/or Web links. The researcher proposes that it is important to discuss the relationships between these new multimodal media and LS.
Figure 4. The timeline of the interviewee’s life events and the present research
CHAPTER 5

LIFE STORY: THE EXPLORATION OF Ore

5-1. Encounter with Japanese and the Birth of Ore

Mathew first talked about his childhood. Just like other children in his generation, he grew up watching Japanese anime such as Pokémon and Cardcaptor Sakura. Then, when he was in the sixth grade, his passion for anime led him to read manga as well. Soon, he discovered Japanese onomatopoeia, which generally remain untranslated in the manga he read, and he started trying to figure out what they meant. In this way, he encountered the Japanese language for the first time. At about same time, he started studying Latin.

M: So I picked Latin (as his foreign language to study at junior high school). And I had a lot of fun, unlike the most of people in the room. *laugh*

R: So, many people had tough time?

M: Well it was like, when you first learn to translate, it gets really frustrating especially when you have to deal with like large passages, even though it's just like baby stuff. It's still kind of frustrating to work with, but I always found a lot of satisfaction doing the homework //uh-hun// for some stupid reason I don't know why. *laugh* The content was horrible. *laugh* It was so silly.

He sounded like he really liked studying foreign languages; he also seemed very happy and proud of being able to study languages that looked difficult. This joy of language learning led him to study Latin for five years. Then one day, the teacher of his Latin class gave her students a message which gave him a huge impact and made him determined to learn Japanese.
M: Anyway, what she said was, the reason we learn foreign language[s] is so that we can...read documents in the original, and do our own interpretations rather than having to rely on anybody else in interpretation, and like pre-chewing that sort of stuff before we insert our own opinions on that. So,
R: Oh, so it's not like tracking..pre-made.
M: No
R: It, it, it's more like...do your..interpretation...?
M: Yeah because you know how much interpretation you have to do every time you translate the sentence.
R: Uh-huh.
M: So many choices, and like all of those choices affect how you read the entire passage.

M: Yeah....To this day, I keep quoting that...I wish I had the exact quote, but I don't
*laugh* Ah...yeah but between the two of those, I just like, I just started applying
that to Japanese because I just, I found so much reading material I wanted to dive
into, whereas other languages I just did not find that same sort of reading
satisfaction.

This is the time in Mathew’s life when he started to learn Japanese. His first goal was to
learn to read manga without translation.

Soon after he started learning Japanese, he met a variety of Japanese first-person
pronouns. Websites like Wikipedia helped him a lot, when learning Japanese by himself.

R: So, so you already knew that there are many pronoun, "I" pronouns in..
M: I did this research *laugh*
R: OK OK.
M: Like, even like in most of your elementary readers there's like, they show you a
pronoun chart somewhere. And so you all see 私, etc etc あなた.etc..か.. 彼彼女..これそれあれ.. Those, those little charts, you expect to see..pronoun charts or
demonstrative charts somewhere in like the first..the first stages of learning
language.
R: うんうね。
M: And that's..that's how I knew they existed.

M: I actually found that really interesting because if you go onto the Wikipedia
page, for the first person pronouns in Japanese and there's like 40 entries.
Mathew found that Japanese has a variety of first-person pronouns, which is used when he refers to himself, while English has only one first-person pronoun, “I,” and different third-person pronouns like “he” and “she,” which are used when one refers to other people or when other people refer to someone else. Learning that he had more control in deciding how to refer to himself in Japanese than in English, he soon started looking for a pronoun that fit his gender identity—which is situated in the middle between masculinity and femininity—the best, and he chose 俺 ore. (The reason he did not choose 私 watashi will more closely be analyzed in the chapter 5-5-3).

M: It's..like..I wanted to..a a a I didn't, I've never really thought..like 私 was worth much. It's like, technically it's gender neutral pronoun, but it's really just like, "Why? Look. ((opens his arms to both sides)) Men have all this range of options!" “((make his hands closer to each other with 5 inch space left between them)) Women." ...So it's like, 私 just, this is a girls' pronoun...

In this way, he started using 俺 ore as his pronoun, but this was not the end of his pronoun exploration. He started to think that 俺 ore does not fit him the best for two reasons.

First, he started thinking that 俺 ore did not sufficiently represent his identity because he identifies himself as somewhere between masculine and feminine. He often describes it as “fence-sitting.”

(Chat with Daniel on March 6, 2015)
D: How do you identify and what are your PGP?
M: PGP=?
D: Preferred Gender Pronouns
Mine are he/his/him
I want to make sure I respect your identity and your preferences
M: Do keep this quiet please
The whole point of my experimentation is to get out from all the second-class bs and self-altercation that is societally expected of being a 'woman'. If I can get out from under that I can be more happily self-expressive…
I'm trying for a more gender neutral because as bad as "women" have it, I've seen plenty of cases where "men" have it just as bad. I want to sit on the fence. Some people like to label that but I refuse to.

Identifying oneself between masculine and feminine is often called “gender-neutral” or “gender non-binary,” but he does not prefer to use those terms as well as “trans,” which assumes transition from male to female or vice versa, not in-between. He argued that those terms have not been concretely defined yet, and he believes that using them for himself would get him involved in some ambiguous political stance. To avoid that, he coined the term “fence-sitting.” In the binary gender view, if masculinity is put on one side and femininity on the other side, there is a boundary right in the middle. Mathew calls this boundary a “fence,” and claims that he is sitting on it. In this way, he is expressing both ideas that he positions himself in-between, and that he is criticizing the binary view sarcastically.

(July 1, 2016)
M: and my honest response is that I want to walk away from the alphabet [LGBTQIA+ acronym] more and more. it's like going to the shoe store and trying to find the perfect pair. every time someone suggests a label to me, it just doesn't feel right. it pinches my toes. I would prefer to walk the earth in bare feet cuz that's all I want to be and that is all I have to be.

(Message to the researcher on July 29, 2016)
Calling oneself a member of the LGBT community is taking a political stance as I see it, and I do not want to be politically affiliated with that group. There are no fixed definitions for any of its terminology. Ask any number of queer-identifying folk what any given gender or sexual orientation means and every single one of them will give you a different, idiosyncratic answer. Until there is a greater level of
consensus about the definitions of terms (among other things), I would prefer to keep myself distanced from that community.

In this way, he has been using “fence-sitting” to express his gender identity for convenience sake, although this may be subject to change depending on how other terms like “gender-neutral” and “gender non-binary” develop in the future. Therefore, the present paper also uses “fence-sitting” as a term that refers to Mathew’s identity, which for the participant means “between masculinity and femininity.”

Second, he also got rejections of his use of 俺 ore from people around him during his high school time, especially from his classmate, Alice. After he entered high school and upon his mother’s suggestion, Matthew started to go to a small private Japanese language school near his home every weekend, which continued throughout his time in high school. In the class, he made friends with a girl called Alice, who was also studying Japanese. When Mathew started talking about her, he sounded very excited at first. She introduced him to what is called visual kei music, which is a kind of Japanese rock music in which musicians dress in specific, outstanding ways. This fostered his interest in Japanese and Japan. However, at some point while talking about memories with Alice, he turned gloomy. “Ah..and..well, let's just say that she was incredibly influential on my life in many positive aspects and many negative aspects.” On the bright side, Alice introduced a new Japanese culture to him, but at the same time, she was the first person who rejected his pronoun 俺 ore. She repeatedly asked him to fix his usage of pronoun and speak like a Japanese girl. He recalls the days with her in the online chat with his friend Ian:
(Chat with Ian on February 29, 2016)
M: I’ve been thinking about Alice again. And I’m still pissed off about every time she said onna rashiku hanashinasai too many years ago.
M: and six years later it still hurts.
I: what would you like me to say here :(
M: I dunno. I had a conversation about that recently and all the old scars got ripped open. I thought I got over it. I’m doing something right now cuz people’ve started asking the pronoun question.
I: Whatever pronoun or gender you feel is best I will be with you 200% percent.
M: *cries* thank you
I: :**

Mathew and Alice eventually stopped communicating after she started attending college in Japan, which at the time compelled her to advise him even more insistently to speak and behave the way Japanese people, and, more specifically, the way Japanese girls do.

M: Like, the person I remember from the high school and the person who came back after the end of the first year of college were two completely different people...And I didn't like what she became. So I, we basically just stopped talking to each other.
R: So she changed.
M: She changed.
R: Drastically.
M: Yeah she got even more prescriptivist.
R: んー..あーわかる。
M: Yyyyeah, like // なんか // 教科書的に完璧な日本語をしゃべるのはありえるけど、おれぇっつばいじゃない。

M: んー、彼女の場合は、あの、見る Mathew は確かに少女だから。少女の、少女みたいにあの、「私」か「あたし」21を使ったら、受け入れてもらえる。かもしれない。

In this way, Mathew gradually started to think that 俺 ore cannot be accepted by others.

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21 Mathew told the researcher afterward that he recalled a case in which Alice also rejected あたし because she thought 私 is more preferable.
For these two reasons—his own discomfort to and others’ rejections of 俺 ore—he eventually decided to make his own pronoun. He started using the following Chinese character for ore 媛, replacing 俺’s radical イ ninben, which indicates “masculine,” with 女 onnanahen, which indicates “feminine,” when he writes in kanji. He got the idea for this new pronoun from Chinese third-person pronouns. In Chinese, there are five different third person pronouns, 他, 她, 它, 牠, and 祂. They are all pronounced ｔā, but used for different referents: 他 for man, 她 for woman, 它 for animals, 祂 for gods, and 它 for others. Except 它, the characters were distinguished by each radical, イ, 女, 半, and 示. The radical 女 of 她 indicates a feminine gender, and イ of 他 indicates a masculine gender (although イ literally means “human” and is, strictly speaking, genderless).

Borrowing these ideas, Mather combined Japanese masculine pronoun 俺 ore with a feminine radical 女 in order to try to “neutralize” the pronoun.

(Chat with Daniel on March 9, 2015)
M: In Mandarin for example there are technically 5 different 3rd person pronouns (他、它、她、牠, and the one for God23) but in practice it really boils down to the first two: “he” and “it”
* a chinese linguistics student explained to me that the only reason a "she" equivalent exists is because of a feminist movement. But really the radical on third person animate is just "person". Person =/= male specifically so that person considered "she” unnecessarily redundant.

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22 In simplified Chinese, only 他, 她, and it are used, and 牠 and 祂 have been integrated into 它.
23 Mathew meant 祂 here, but he could not remember what the third-person pronoun for gods was during the chat.
He started using this “fence-sitting” pronoun, and he started using 婦 and 俺 interchangeably because, at that time, he still did not know that 婦 is a character that actually exists and could not type it. In the message he sent the researcher, he recalled this moment of pronoun invention as the time when he found a place to settle in emotionally.

(Message to the researcher on April 25, 2016)
M: But most importantly, I've accepted that no matter what I do I will never fit in, so I carved out a place for myself in the universe. I can never be 僕 or 俺 without fierce criticism.

5-2. Re-invention of 婦 ore

With all of his interests and passions toward language study, Mathew started majoring in Japanese and linguistics at a university in New England in 2012. When he was a sophomore, an important incident about the character 婦 occurred. One of his friends gave him a pdf file of the chart of every Chinese character which exists in Unicode, and Mathew happened to find 婦 on that chart!

R: OK. How, how this happened?.....You, you you first learned this 漢字 exist? Or you just made up?
M: No I made it up.
R: But it, it turned out to be,
M: It turns out to be real,
R: Real, real character.
M: Yeah.
R: Oh, OK OK.
M: Yeah, which was a really fun surprise!
His joy at that time is also revealed from the chat logs in which he was telling his friend about his biggest discovery.

(Chat with Ian on June 21, 2015)
M: 存在するもの～！俺が自由

(Chat with Leah on June 19, 2015)
M: And some kanji magic happened last night. I AM FREE
L: What.. does that mean
M: 呢是自由啊！
L: Right. And when I.. get closer to a dictionary XD

(September 6, 2015)
M: I scrawled a comment with this kanji 僢 on my whiteboard and one of the japanese exchange students this year read it perfectly. LIFE IS GOOD

However, the definition of the character 僷 was a little disappointing to him.

M: Like, I've been searching around the dictionary, for, weeks and weeks and weeks trying to find an entry for the character. And the only thing that would pop up is something that says like northern Chinese dialects. So it's like it's not even used in Chinese.
R: Oh, I, I've read that somewhere. (in one of the chat logs)
M: Yeah. It's in here somewhere, and it's like, and I finally found um, something which simple enough Chinese I can figure out what the definition was, and it said like..maid servant...
R: This?
M: Yeah.
R: へぇー。
M: ....Yeah. And it's like, ちょっとがっかりしてるねー（笑）
R: だろうね（笑）

Learning the definition of the character, he almost considered abandoning 僷, but he continued to use it thanks to his friend’s suggestion.

(Chat with Ian on July 20, 2015)
I: I think I was really confused at first but there is indeed an おれ with an 女 radical?? Holy shit 僷 I wonder if people will understand if you expect an Ore
I’d comment on the meanings but all first person pronouns are kinda self-deprecating XDD

(Interview)
M: つい最近。Um, what he write back to me was, "You know, most Japanese pronouns are pretty self-deprecating anyways." I mean like, 僕 means slave for crying out loud.
R: ..Yeah, it, yeah, its another reading is しもべ actually, so
M: Yeah. So it's like, 僕イコールしもべ、この僕は女中だから、((He snapped his finger and thumb with his face lighten up.)) ぜんぜん大丈夫でしょう！（笑）
R: ...なるほどね。
M: And after that I was just like, こればかり（笑）

M: […] Yeah. I was like, I almost, I almost stopped there, but then he was like, "No." And so I, I went on...I almost quit but I didn't. ((speaking passionately))
And,
R: それはやっぱり、僕とかのおかげ？
M: うん。で、でもその上、あの一、みんな、だいたいこの漢字知らないから、//うん// まあ、誰も知らないかもしれないけど、あの、そのわけで自分があなの一、その、その漢字の意味を作り直せる

As seen in the chat log and interview transcripts above, Mathew had at first been disappointed because of the subservient meaning of the character 僕. However, Ian helped him think about it differently, pointing out that there are also other Japanese first-person pronouns that are originally meant to be self-deprecating, but do not have such meanings anymore, such as 僕 boku. In this way, Mathew re-invented the Chinese character 僕 by giving it his definition and putting it into use again in Japanese. While he was explaining to the researcher why the actual meaning of the Chinese character 僕 does not matter to him, he looked and sounded very excited and happy, with laughs and gestures like snapping his finger and thumb. These expressions show his feelings of confidence, joy, peace of mind, and hope for the pronoun. The chat with Ian can be
considered important for his “breakthrough.” Furthermore, not only Ian but also the other friends with whom Mathew communicates by chat accepted his usage of 媛. Therefore, Mathew probably would not have been able to continue to use 媛 without his friends support. They opened a door that once had closed for Mathew, and helped him advance his thinking about the language he was using. His friends—allies—had a significant role in his gender identity expression in Japanese. Since then, he started using 媛 instead of 俺 always.

What Mathew accomplished with 媛 can be considered as a metrolingual invention of a new language. Learning that the third-person pronouns 他 tā (he) and 她 tā (she) in Chinese are distinguished by their radicals ( 亻 and 女), he applied the system to the Japanese pre-existing pronoun, 俺 ore, which is considered masculine, and coined the “neutralized” first-person pronoun 媛 ore. Furthermore, when he found out that 媛 is a Chinese character that actually exists, he next redefined its meaning and changed its pronunciation into ore. What he (re)invented can be considered what metrolingualism calls “new language,” because the invention occurred through the hybrid of Japanese and Chinese.

In addition, it also should be noted that the invention of 媛 ore had been influenced by Unicode. Unicode’s coverage of Chinese characters determines in practical terms whether a certain character can be represented on digital devices, and new characters that are personally coined can hardly be registered. Indeed, Mathew could not use 媛 on his laptop nor smartphone until he learned that the character actually exists in Unicode. Therefore, Unicode works to fix language, limiting its fluidity on digital media.
In this sense, the (re)invention of 俺 has occurred between the fixation of language (Unicode) and the fluidity and dynamism of language, which were brought about by Mathew’s creativity to coin a neologism. This outcome also supports the idea of metrolingualism, which considers language to be both fixed, and fluid and dynamic.

Furthermore, 俺 has brought a new sense of values (what metrolingualism calls “new culture”) among Japanese pronouns. The message 俺 carries is “neither masculine nor feminine” or “between masculinity and femininity,” and this means that 俺 per se can contain a specific idea about gender: that is, that it can be non-binary. Such a first-person pronoun does not exist among those commonly used in daily Japanese life. Even the gender-neutral pronoun 私 watashi is used without reference to gender and is not based on any specific gender viewpoint. Therefore, 俺 is not only the emersion of a new language, but also “new culture.” The pronoun always manifests the denial of gender binary, unlike the other Japanese pronouns.

Finally, the researcher also would like to mention that, for Mathew, this invention of new language and culture was more than “new language” and “new culture.” With the help of his friends, he took a step out of the ideology of the gender binary in the Japanese-speaking world and entered a new sphere. This may seem like one small step for mankind, but it was actually one giant leap for Mathew.

5-3. Imposed Gender Expression

In parallel with the invention and re-invention of 俺 ore, Mathew gradually became less able to accept his femininity, and, finally in 2015, he rejected it completely.
When he first invented 嫦, he still could “look in the mirror and say, ‘this is a girl.’” He said “And I thought I was a girl, because everybody else called me a girl. And just like, I accepted that as a social norm.” As he grew up, however, he gradually became intolerant of being sexualized everywhere. He confessed in his chat with Daniel how this feeling developed through his experiences of being asked how difficult it is for him to be a woman.  

He has lived through people’s misgendering, being called “miss” and “lady.”

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24 This conversation happened on July 1, 2016. The researcher directly quoted the confession in the first draft of the present study, but Mathew asked the researcher to summarize it instead because the confession is too direct and personal. Therefore, the researcher respected his preference.

25 Mathew does not mind being called with the feminine pronoun “she” in English. This is because he understands that the gender of English third-person pronouns derives from grammatical gender, which is totally arbitrary and unrelated to the actual gender of the individual, although English grammatical gender has mostly disappeared today. In other words, he considers that “he” and “she” do not contain any social meaning. Therefore, for him, the gender judgment in English is totally up to each speaker, not the referent of the pronoun used. Therefore, being referred to with the pronoun “she” and being called “miss” or “lady” are totally different subjects to him. On the other hand, he considers that Japanese first-person pronouns contain social meanings, and thus that he should have control over them.

(Message to the researcher on July 29, 2016)

Japanese pronouns convey a SOCIAL gender. Pronouns in most European languages convey a GRAMMATICAL gender. Grammatical gender is a form of agreement between referent and reference based on phonetics and phonology; it has no social meaning. To call agreement pattern 1 "masculine," pattern 2 "feminine," and pattern 3 "neuter," is totally arbitrary.

I honestly do not care what you refer to me as in English, whether that should be "he," "she," "they," or one of those more avant-garde pronouns, like "xe" or "zir." Your perspective is as equally valid as mine. In fact, there may be situations where using a different pronoun to refer to different third-parties in a group situation might be more convenient.

Grammatical gender has mostly disappeared in English. It is up to the speaker to make a grammatical judgement call.
More than anything else, he recalled being told once that he was as attractive and that that was “the most terrifying things anyone has ever said to” him. Along with the misgendering, misogynistic social expectations have also caused him much consternation. The following picture (Figure 5) is an excerpt from Rachael Johnson’s graphic novel (Johnson, 2015, p. 23), which is the author’s autobiography to a great extent. In the represented scene, the protagonist (who is on the right side) and the protagonist’s brother (who is on the left side) are in black suits, and someone (the person with light hair) first praises the brother, telling him that he is handsome. However, the person with the light hair then turns to the protagonist and says, “and you—don’t you look beautiful!” Here, the protagonist becomes indignant about the comments. The word “beautiful” implies that the protagonist was regarded as feminine, and that the person with light hair thinks that she should be beautiful. The scene is similar to Mathew’s experience. Mathew confessed that he could relate himself to the graphic novel enough to say that Johnson’s life can be seen as a parallel to his, and that the excerpted scene was

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However, social gender is not your judgement to make. It is mine. Biological disposition does not equal social gender. Not all females are "ladies."

However, the present research could not figure out when Mathew developed this linguistic idea of the difference between grammatical gender and social gender of pronouns. This distinction seems not so commonly known in the current English-speaking world in general, considering the fact that telling one’s preferred third-person gender pronoun to others is pretty common these days. It seems unlikely to the researcher that a 14-year-old kid has this sort of idea in his mind from the beginning when he started teaching himself a foreign language. Since the life story is told by the interviewee “here and now,” the interviewee tells a story based on their evaluation and interpretation on their past experience that is made at the time of the interview. In this sense, the present research may have neither enough data nor analysis.
one of the parts he himself could relate to the most.

Figure 5. An excerpt from Rachael Johnson’s thesis

Matthew also suffered from the decision of clothing industries that try not only to over-sexualize his body but also to deny him as well. He is taller than average, and thus already limited in what clothing options are available to him. Because all of his feelings about his body have accumulated over many years, he even felt the impulse to destroy his
body. He told Daniel that he wishes to be evaluated by what he has achieved, not by his appearance. Eventually, he realized that he could not use the first-person pronoun 私 watashi anymore.

It was when he finished all the Japanese language courses in the university and shifted his interest to Classical Japanese and translation in his junior year that he found himself unable to utter 私 watashi to refer to himself (he also hates it whenever he happens to say 私 watashi and notices it right after the utterance). It took a while for the researcher to understand why he could not use 私 watashi, which is supposed to be a gender-neutral pronoun.

R: Even though like...Japanese men...use 私.
M: Yeah. Like, I know I should be able to use it. I just, I'm so used to not using it. I can't get it back...though I have...like if I, if I stop thinking about it, I can use it....
R: それは女が嫌すぎるから？
M: ...Yeah...well that's not necessarily only reason but..a good portion of it...

R: […] だって、本当の日本語はそういう、function じゃないからね（笑）
M: Yeah I know that! It's more fluid, and you've told me that *laugh* And you are not the only person who's told me that. And I figured that out myself. It's just like...I, I guess when I started having a pronoun conversation, um, everything, like, all the fluidity that I understand, and I tried to apply. It gets a little bit more locked up.

Later, the researcher finally understood what it meant for Mathew to use 私 watashi when he started to talked about what it means for him to use 僕 boku. As the readers of the present LS may also have thought, the researcher asked Mathew about other pronoun options such as 僕 boku, the more polite masculine pronoun, as well as 私 watashi, the pronoun that is used regardless of gender. Mathew told the researcher that he once had a long conversation on his pronoun use with Toyota-sensei, another teacher of Japanese in
the university, and she suggested that he use 僕 boku instead of 俺/俺 ore first. At that
time, he re-confirmed that 僕 boku does not suit him.

M: She suggested, um..um, one of the things she said in there was, ah, "What
happens if you were a 僕?" And, I still think about that, but I just like...every
instinct in me says that 僕 is incredibly..juvenile. I know that's not true, but just
like...that's how I’ve always felt about it. So I didn't really feel like I can be that,
that sort of person. I'm just, I'm not cute! People say otherwise, but I don't think I'm
cute! And I'm not gonna have people, projecting かわいさ onto me. And I felt like,
using 僕 would probably invite that.....
R: なるほどね。(a little overawed by Mathew's strong voice)

And then he talked about 私 watashi again.

M: Yeah. Though, some strange reason actually when I was practicing for my
JET26 interview, um, I found myself using 僕, a lot, because I just, now, I have a
really hard time using 私. I just, every time I tried to use, I choke. I can't say it....

What he is trying to do here is to eradicate かわいさ kawaisa (cuteness) and femininity
completely from himself. Even though 私 watashi can be used regardless of one’s
gender, for him using the pronoun allows other people to regard him as a woman and
permits them to call him with other feminine terms such as name+ちゃん, お嬢さん, and
お姉さん, just like he was called “miss” and “lady” in English. For the same reason, he
feels that 僕 boku is not masculine enough to remove cuteness and thus still includes the
danger of causing people to think of him as “cute.” Therefore, he has difficulty using

26 JET stands for the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme, which is conducted by
the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR).
pronouns such as 僕 boku and 私 watashi not only because of his preference, but also because the perceptions which people in the society would possibly impose upon him.

Here, it is as important to pay attention to Mathew’s inability to use 私 watashi as well as studying 媛 ore because there is a disconnect between his “fence-sitting” gender identity and his actual gender expression. In practice, always using ore in spoken language, where 媛 and 俺 are not distinguishable, results in expressing more masculinity than other men in general do. Therefore, his “fence-sitting,” the identity which is between masculine and feminine, should be able to be achieved through 私 watashi, the gender-neutral pronoun. However, people regard him as female with 私 watashi, and thus he is presented with a dilemma, in which he has to choose either from the two options: use 私 watashi and be projected as female, or express super-masculinity with ore and hopefully be seen as falling somewhere between male and female. Therefore, 媛 in written language is a necessity for Mathew to accurately express his gender identity. However, it should be noted that in regards to the spoken language, he has not yet overcome the aforementioned dilemma.

As explained before, Mathew positions his gender identity “in the middle between masculinity and femininity.” This “fence-sitting” identity seems to contradict the fact that he only hates being seeing as feminine, not masculine (although he is unlikely to seen as masculine). It seems that his gender identity was originally more fluid, not having a specific position all the time, when he started teaching himself Japanese. It is traumatic experiences of rejections from others like Alice that made him think that he could not be masculine. This external factor of rejection made him convince himself stronger and
stronger through his adolescence that he is not masculine. In this sense, he does not particularly mind being seen as masculine, but he now believes that it is unlikely to happen. On the other hand, hard times he experienced as being feminine made him try to stop being feminine. Unlike masculinity, people around Mathew did not deny his femininity itself, but the experiences he had as being feminine made him feel never comfortable with his femininity anymore. Therefore, his gender identity used to have a wide range from masculinity to femininity at first, and then later it was ejected from both sides to the middle. It looks like he chose to “fence-sit,” but actually he was also heavily influenced by people around him. These external factors cannot be disregarded to understand the true meaning of his choice of his gender identity. For this reason, as for Mathew, staying between masculine and feminine and denying his femininity do not conflict with each other theoretically.

Mathew told the researcher that he wishes that using ore in conversation successfully projected his position between masculinity and femininity, but he also emphasized how difficult it is.

M: Like, when, when you see like, when you typically see a transgender person, you don't accept as transgender unless they pass as one or the other. The people in the middle always get thrown under the bus. Or like all the gender non-binary people, all the agender people were all in this like little, mess over here. And then like, nobody pays attention to those people. They always get ignored. //Uh-hun.// ..They don't fit in, even within the greater context of like the whole LGBT community. They don't fit! (with a strong voice)

This phenomenon of being unable to use imus watashi, shows that the pronoun is merely for “both” genders but for “all” genders, and that Japanese society is still powerfully dominated by the idea of a binary gender, that is, only male, female, and nothing
between them. Although it is true that Mathew uses 嫉 ore of his own choice, at the same time, as Norton’s notion of identity suggested, Mathew’s gender identity and its expression were strongly connected to society (people’s perceptions), and it resulted in him being unable to use 仮 watashi.

5-4. Ore and Politeness

Since Japanese first-person pronouns do not just express the referent’s gender but also expresses a level of politeness, there are situations in which ore is difficult to use. Ore is obviously too impolite to be used in communications with teachers, bosses, older people, and so on. It should be noted that Mathew is fully aware of this issue. At this point, in polite situation, he uses 嫉 ore only with Toyota-sensei, with whom he has discussed the pronoun for a long time already. However, as noted earlier, it is limited to only written communication (such as email) because he cannot distinguish 仏 from 嫉 in spoken language. His basic strategy is to use mostly 自分 instead of 仮 watashi.

M: Um, I use it as I would use a regularly, regular 仏, like I know there's situations where I can't use it...and there's situations probably I shouldn't use it, like I was writing a paper for Kato-sensei for example. I would use 仏. As much as I don't like that word as much...because it's a formal item, I would...I would not use ore.
R: Paper とか。
M: Yeah.
R: 先生とのコミュニケーションの時？
M: そう。
R: What, what do you, what "I" do you use with Toyota-sensei?
M: ....mostly 自分.
R: ああ、なるほど。So 仏とか自分、
M: When I decided I wanted to give up 仏, I mostly went to 自分.
R: ...なるほど。So...so if you, no, so you don't want to use 仏.
M: Right.
R: But you want to maintain the..politeness.
M: Right.
R: Then, the third option is 自分.
M: Yeah.
R: Oh OK OK.

R: [...] Are you expanding the use of ore?
M: ...I would like to. I would like to be able to just, just like, use some form of 自分, without necessarily being specifically ore.....
R: ちょっとずつ？ Are, are you actually expanding now?
M: Um, I still don't use it in front of professors....except for Toyota-sensei. Like I used it in the video project. I’ve used it on some of her handouts..because, we've got over this.
R: “姫”ね。
M: おんなへんの姫。
R: うん。で、「自分」も使う時がある。
M: はい。
R: で一、他の先生の時も「自分」？ Or still 私 sometimes?
M: Yeah. Like, 山田先生とか加藤先生とか、澤田先生とか、ほとんど「自分」か「私」。
R: じゃあ..でもいつも「自分」じゃないんだそれも？
M: ..まあ、
R: Interchangeably 私 and 自分？
M: Still, mostly settled on 自分. Like, 9 times out of 10 it’s probably going to 自分.
R: OK OK OK. でも、まあ、たまーに「私」？
M: うん。たーまに。
R: あまり理由はないんでしょ？
M: まあ、あまり気づかない。 (笑)
R: でしよう。It's just like, processing in second language and you happen to use 私, kind of thing right?
M: Yeah.
R: OK OK OK.
M: *laugh*

Although he occasionally slips and says 私 watashi, he does not seem comfortable saying it. After the present research was under way, there was an instance when he
texted the researcher to jokingly notify that he used 私 watashi in a conversation by
texted the researcher to jokingly notify that he used 私 watashi in a conversation by accident.

After listening to how Mathew uses/does not use 奴 ore in polite situations at the university, the researcher asked him how he desires to live with 奴 ore in the future. This is because he was hoping either to work in Japan or to have a job that lets him use Japanese such as translation. The politeness issue will undoubtedly always arise with the ore pronoun if he ever uses it in business. In this sense, the researcher was not sure whether 奴 ore is the best answer for him to use for the rest of his life. His answer was rather pessimistic, and he had low expectations of Japanese society:

M: あーあの、だいたい、um あの、普通みたいに、あのー、おれや自分の、I use both of them because, 丁寧さによって場合によって、ひとつ、もうひとつ使えるかも。あのー、でも、それはアメリカの話だけだ。あの、日本に行ったたら..can I get away with the same things? I don't think so.
R: What, what do you mean "get away with the same things"?
M: Like, when you are in a community of language learners, you permit a lot more than you would, when you are around a bunch of native speakers. So like, //Ah.// In this particular situation where I'm surrounded by a bunch of kids who, don't know Japanese, they're a lot more willing to let things slide. Like, like even like mistakes in 丁寧さ as like, if you accidentally use like, だ体 in a situation where you are supposed to be using like ですます体, people will, look the other way especially language teacher at this particular point. But like, as soon as I would go out into, um, Ja, Japanese centric society, X I know I'm never gonna be accepted. I'm still that white kid, and I know, that, Japan is, generally not as open to accepting out- group members into the in-group. Those out-group members will continually stay there because there's a line in the sand and they do not cross it. But, I wonder if one of these days if I were in a sort of community I would actually be able to finally use this. (the pronoun 奴)
R: You're hoping?
M: I hope. Yeah.
He told the researcher that he was going to explore his pronoun usage further. At this point, he has not clearly decided how to live with 她 ore. He might try to persuade people around him to recognize the pronoun, or look for other, handier alternative pronouns that fit him instead. Like the manga he loves, the adventure of Mathew (and his pronoun) is “to be continued.”

5-5. A need for spaces to try out different identities

Mathew has been exploring his pronoun in Japanese since the very beginning of his “Japanese life,” even before adolescence, when one’s sense of identity quickly changes and sometimes painfully so. He graduated from his university in May 2016, but I would like to ask what could teachers and educational institutions do to support his exploration. In the four-hour long interview, he once made his request to teachers of Japanese.

M: でーあの、ここ (the university) じゃ、自分の印象はあの、まーあの、赤ちゃんとなんて、あの、完璧に..教科書的に話さないんだろ。
R: うん。
M: あの、そ、育つと、あの、遊ぶでしょ?
R: うん。
M: だからその遊びで、あの、いろんな事を習って、自分たちも学生として、あの、遊ぶ時間が必要だと思って、「遊ばせてくださいね先生。」って言っても、あの、先生が遊ばせてもらえない。（遊ばせてくれない。）
R: うん。
M: 特に加藤先生。...どのように、あの、遊んでみても、あの、なん、なんか、実験してみても....してはいけないみたいな態度がある。
R: あ、つまり、you want to play with Japanese?
M: Uh-hun.
R: that, which you were learning.
M: Uh-hun.
R: Like, try and,
M: Like "Do this. Do that. Just see what works." because like, that's the only way I'm gonna explore my world. But she's like,
R: Try, try and see if it success, if it success, or not.
M: Right.
R: OK.
M: But like, um language education is like, "There is this one path, and you do not stray from the path. If you stray from the path, bad things happen." And I don't like that attitude. I'm fighting that attitude.

What he required was a laboratory or a playground that would allow him to try different identity expressions in his target language with less painful results. In other words, he needed a place to safely “try and fail” (and hopefully succeed eventually) before actually entering other facets of the Japanese-speaking world like the business industry, where he expects a harsher backlash against his pronoun. Mathew described this kind of environment as a clothes store, where he can try on different clothes (=identities). If it is important to consider “what kind of language user do you aspire to be?” as Sato (2015) suggests, the researcher considers it just as important for language classes to provide learners with opportunities to actually try out being different kinds of language users. It is, of course, important for Japanese learners to attain the knowledge of the actual rules of each Japanese pronoun. However, there should be freedom for the learners after learning them. Between the rules (fixation) and the freedom (fluidity and dynamism) in the language classroom, the place which the researcher considers a metrolingual space, each Japanese learner can cultivate a better sense of who they are as a Japanese user in the future. In terms of the clothes shop metaphor, Mathew also quoted an art class teacher he had a class with in the university: Learn the rules. Master the rules. And break the rules.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The LS of Mathew shows his journey exploring his use of a Japanese pronoun with a lot of joy and pain. For him, learning another language means looking for the best way to express who he desires to be, and who he wants to be seen as. He coined a new Japanese gender-neutral first-person pronoun 她 ore for the sake of his gender expression. He first invented the pronoun with a hint he got from Chinese third-person pronouns, and later on, when he found that the character 她 ore can be represented on digital media, he re-invented the word, giving it a new meaning. The (re)invention of 她 was achieved within the hybrid of Japanese and Chinese, which were both dynamic and fluid thanks to Mathew’s creativity of trying to coin a new word, and the fixation, which was brought by the technical limitation set by Unicode. This is the condition for the emersion of a new language (which metrolingualism explains), and Mathew actually has achieved making a new word (new language). In addition, it should be noted that Mathew could continue to use 她 even after he found that the character means “maid servant,” because his friends (his community) supported him using the character. The researcher believes that allies or a community which accepts diverse identities is indispensable for language learners to explore their identities and identity expressions like Mathew did. The community is a metrolingual space, which helps learners engage in metrolingual practices.

What Mathew invented is not only the word 她, but also a new sense of value (new culture) in the Japanese-speaking world: a non-binary gender point of view. Although 私
 watashi is considered to be a gender-neutral pronoun, it merely means that the pronoun is available to both male and female. In this sense, 婁 is designed specifically for people who identify themselves between masculine and feminine like Mathew, and thus the pronoun is specifically based on a non-binary gender point of view. Therefore, 婁 can be considered as a transformative power to challenge the ideology of gender as binary as well as that of what Tanaka (2011) calls “Japanese language nationalism,” which views the Japanese language spoken or written by Japanese people as superior, compared to the Japanese that is spoken or written by non-Japanese people, including Japanese language learners.
However, it should also be noted just how powerful the gender binary ideology is. This power was encountered when Mathew was unable to use 私 watashi, not his use of 嫁 ore. At first sight, it looks he used 嫁 ore of his own choice completely. However, it is also true that his use of the new pronoun is actually the reflection of his inability to use 私 watashi, which inevitably projects him as woman, the identity he has been trying to eradicate from himself. This case shows that Mathew’s gender identity and its expression have been strongly influenced by the ideology of the gender binary, and that the ideology

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27 See footnote #5.
actually resides within the word 仆 watashi itself as well as in Japanese society. Before interviewing Mathew, the researcher was actually expecting 她 ore, thinking that the pronoun could produce a transformative power that challenges the ideology of the gender binary as well as “Japanese language nationalism.” It took a long time for the researcher, who brought this attitude to the interviews, to realize the true power of the gender binary and “Japanese language nationalism” ideologies. As a result, the researcher had difficulty for a long time in understanding why Mathew could not use the pronoun 仆 watashi. The researcher repeated the general fact that it is a gender-neutral pronoun, without noticing that it is not for “all” genders, but merely for “both genders.”

Although the power of Mathew and his use of she are minimal, his LS suggested the significance of a place for language learners to try out different identities and their expressions, which facilitates their sense of self as a Japanese language user. Through these identity trials, teachers of Japanese can help their learners consider what is the goal of their “Japanese life,” or their self-realization in the future. Language Education for the Global Citizen expects learners “to learn the communities’ rules (e.g. knowledge and norms of language and culture), critically consider, negotiate with, and be negotiated by them in order to choose either to inherit or to try to change the rules, not simply accept them.” In this way, teachers can introduce different Japanese pronouns in relation to gender, politeness, and so on as the norm, and then let each learner choose one of them, try making one themselves, or re-define a pre-existing pronoun (just like Mathew did), rather than imposing certain pronouns on learners from the start. By creating this sort of environment, classrooms can become metrolingual spaces, and thus can recreate a space
like the one where Mathew made new language (the new pronoun 婢) and culture (the gender view as non-binary). Although Mathew’s usage of 婢 alone does not have the power to change society, he is significantly influential interpersonally. His three friends had a lot of thoughts on gender through conversations with him, and the researcher himself has thought about gender and its expression more than ever before the present study. In this sense, classrooms which allow different identities and their expressions will produce more Japanese language learners like Mathew, and eventually those small powers create social transformations. In turn, the researcher hopes that not only classrooms, but also a variety of spaces in society (such as business offices and public events), and then, ultimately, society as a whole, will become a metrolingual space where diverse identities are accepted. The researcher wishes that native Japanese speakers would become more aware of the possibility of a non-binary gender view.

Although it was fortunate that the present study could have a four-hour long interview as well as the follow-up interview and continuous communications with the interviewee, more long-term interviews would be required for closer analysis of this case. First, eight years have already passed since Mathew had started his Japanese gender pronoun exploration until the time of the interviews, and thus the present research cannot easily comprehensively cover the whole eight years and simply give a conclusion to his life story. In addition, his life still continues, and his exploration of Japanese gender pronoun is probably still at its beginning, considering the fact that he is still twenty-two years old and has just graduated from college. He will start working as an adult and have more and more experiences that are quite different from the ones he had in the past twenty-two years. Through all the experiences he will have in the future, his gender
identity and use of Japanese first-person pronoun may still change. Second, when interviewees tell their LSs, the stories are influenced by their evaluations and interpretations of their past experiences that are made at the time of the interviews (“here and now”). Mathew may view his experiences he told in the present study differently and have different opinions to them in the future. For this reasons, interviewing Mathew multiple times in the future (five, ten, and more years later, for example) to study the changes of his perception and understanding of his gender identity would make the life story richer and more descriptive. Identities are more complex and fluid than it used to be considered, and long-term and more close researches are required.

At the end of this paper, the researcher shows his reflections on the LS so that the present study could become one “resource” of LS in the field of Japanese language education. Even though it is the interviewee that finally decided to tell his LS, the process of telling LS brought a lot of past pain back to him. There were a few times he got emotional and spoke in a tearful voice. Moreover, it was only after the interview that the researcher noticed that extent of Mathew’s emotional pain lie not only in what he told to the interviewer but in what remained untold:

M: ..There was a lot conflict. I'm editing it out because it happened over like, probably a six year period.
R: ..Y, you don't have to edit it.
M: Well like,
R: What do you mean by that?
M: Like...we've been talking for like over an hour, and I've been talking about stuff that happened when I was like 15, 14..how many years ago was that? Almost 8? *laugh* I've been giving you like, my life story of this. I had to cut somewhere, condensing it, to like the major events. I can't give you all the individual feelings I've had. I can't give you all the nightmares I've had. I can't give you all of the conflict I've had. I cannot show you the pain. I can't show you the turmoil. Like, I can try to articulate it, but I'm not really good at talking about my feelings. Honestly.... ((spoken strongly and very fast))
M: [...] Well like, that's what happened when I re-read this. (the chat logs) Like..I wanna say that I re-lived like..two years of internal turmoil. It was kind of painful going through all of this and editing...

LS researchers should keep in mind that interviewees are re-living their life when they tell their LS, and that the emotional pain shown in their interviews may be only the tip of the iceberg. It is impossible for the researcher to be responsible for Mathew’s “Japanese life,” but the researcher will continue to communicate with Mathew, following his adventure of the Japanese pronoun.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


