TO ALIGN OR DISALIGN: NAVIGATING JAPANESE FIRST-PERSON PRONOUNS FROM THE CLASSROOM AND BEYOND

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Abstract. First-person singular pronouns in Japanese act as a salient tool for identity construction. Japanese speakers have dozens of pronoun options available to them, with each indexing manifolds of pragmatic information such as masculinity/femininity, assertiveness, and social distance. Despite this, Japanese second-language (L2) classrooms typically take an over-simplistic and prescriptivist approach to Japanese speech styles, begging the question of how those who have learned the language primarily through classroom instruction are able to navigate such a highly-pragmatic pronominal system, especially when existing literature overwhelmingly focuses on L2 speakers who have experience in full-immersion settings. To address these discrepancies, I conducted a focus group with five English-speaking classroom learners of Japanese. By taking a grounded approach and subsequently coding the data for affective stances, I found that certain stance-takings allowed participants to either align, or disalign with the pronoun choices that were taught to them in the classroom. It was additionally found that the intersubjective tactics which shaped participants' pronoun choices were highly contextual and learner-dependent, with the symbolic authoritative power of academic institutions playing a crucial role in hindering not only L2 identity construction but also L2 identity exploration. As such, this study calls for critical pedagogy where classroom learners are empowered, rather than prescribed the L2 identities they are able to negotiate.

Plain English Abstract. For effective communication to take place, it is said that sociopragmatic competence is key: the ability to appropriately vary one's speech depending on the social situation. Japanese is one such language where sociopragmatic competence is especially crucial. One instance of this is the selection of first-person singular pronouns (1PPs). Whereas English only has one 1PP, 'I', Japanese has over one dozen, with each expressing varying degrees of pragmatic information such as masculinity/femininity, politeness, etc. Thus, in selecting a 1PP, Japanese speakers are inherently creating a distinct social identity. Navigating such a highly-pragmatic pronominal system would seem rather challenging for Japanese second-language (L2) learners. Yet, existing research overwhelmingly focuses on the experiences of study abroad students, ignoring a major population of L2 speakers: those who have learned Japanese primarily in the classroom. Moreover, studies show that classrooms present Japanese speech styles in an oversimplified fashion, inhibiting students from wholly expressing their L2 selves. To address these discrepancies, I conducted a focus group with five English-speaking classroom learners of Japanese. Through employing a grounded data analysis approach, affective stances emerged as a salient trend, and it was found that certain stances allowed participants to either align or disalign with the pronoun choices they were taught in the classroom. By drawing connections between their experiences in authoritative academic institutions and their notable ambivalence towards exploring new identities in Japanese, this paper concludes by calling for critical pedagogy, so that classroom learners may feel more empowered in choosing their true, desired L2 identity.

1   Introduction

For speakers of English, the act of 'choosing' a first-person singular pronoun (1PP) is not a difficult one as there is only one option: 'I'. However, for speakers of Japanese, this decision becomes more nuanced. Japanese theoretically has an infinite number of personal pronouns because they make up an open syntactic class (Toguchi, 1997). This means that existing 1PPs frequently change and new forms can easily be added to the language. With so many pronoun options available to the Japanese speaker and with each one indexing vast collections of pragmatic information, both first-language (L1) and second-language (L2) speakers, then, essentially have a great deal of self-agency in the construction of their social identity.

However, for effective communication to take place, Japanese speakers must also have a certain degree of sociopragmatic competence. This can be described as the ability to appropriately vary one's speech in consideration of the social context and communication conventions typical of that culture/ language. As an L2 Japanese speaker myself, the task of navigating the Japanese pronominal system became rather daunting as I grew more aware of such sociopragmatic complexities; yet prescriptivist pedagogies in the classroom continued to restrict my linguistic choices to ones deemed as 'appropriate' for foreign speakers, in effect, controlling the L2 identity I was able to construct for myself. Indeed, Japanese L2 classroom instruction in North America largely fails to equip students with the framework needed to navigate such a pragmatic system; and at the same time, full-immersion settings are argued to be the key in attaining such competence, with studies often depicting learners who, after their time abroad, blossom into active social agents (Iwasaki, 2010) when negotiating their L2 identity. This raises two important questions: Firstly, for L2 speakers who have never been immersed in Japanese-speaking communities, how do they come to understand the highly-pragmatic Japanese pronominal system? Secondly, how do learners decide on what 1PP to use when they may not identify with, nor want to align with the narrow scope of options presented to them in the classroom?

This paper will explore such questions while making reference to Language Socialisation Theory (Ochs, 1993; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986), and more critically, the Relationality Principle as defined by Bucholtz and Hall (2005). Through conducting a focus group and coding the data for affective stances, I will first describe the ways in which participants' affective stances diverged from each other, allowing them to assume either convergent or divergent social identities that aligned or disaligned with their classroom instruction. I will also attempt to report on the intersubjective relations and personal factors that became salient in participants' selection of pronouns, and the extent to which this is incidental to their past experiences as students in Japanese L2 classrooms.

2   Background

2.1   Japanese First-Person Singular Pronouns

One hallmark of the Japanese language is gendered speech, which includes first-person singular pronouns. With a society based on traditional gender roles, gendered speech in Japanese is both a reflection of and a means by which these social expectations are perpetuated, as males and females are expected to stick to their prescribed speech styles. Despite this, when we look at real discourse practices by L1 speakers, we find that gender alone cannot predict one's discourse, and it is not uncommon to hear even girls using stereotypically masculine speech (Miyazaki, 2004; Okamoto, 1995). Existing literature has additionally shown that both L1 and L2 speakers use pronominal forms as a means to index manifold

social meanings such as assertiveness, solidarity, formality, and social distance, to name a few (Abe, 2004; Brown & Cheek, 2017; Hanaoka, 2020; Lee & Yonezawa, 2008; Miyazaki, 2004; Sturtzstreetharan, 2009). Other factors such as age (Sturtzstreetharan, 2009) and even the topic of conversation (Lee & Yonezawa, 2008) can influence one's pronoun choice in Japanese. As each 1PP carries a unique set of social indexes, and with no one pronoun being entirely neutral (Coomber, 2013), the act of choosing a self-referential form is heavily situated in context (Abe, 2004; Miyazaki, 2004). To ignore the social dynamics of the immediate environment is to ignore the very foundation upon which Japanese pronouns take on pragmatic meaning, making sociopragmatic competence especially key to intercultural communication.

Table 1 (adapted from Hanaoka, 2020) shows some of the most commonly used first-person singular pronominal forms via a scale of intensity, albeit being a highly simplified representation. There is a positive relationship between intensity and strength of gender indexicality and a negative relationship with politeness indexicality. For example, the coarse male pronoun 'ore' would be considered highly masculine and also informal (Miyazaki, 2004). It should be noted that the most common 'form' of 1PPs in Japanese is actually non-occurrence (i.e., when the pronoun is not overtly marked). However, since significant sociopragmatic meaning emerges when pronouns are overtly stated (Lee & Yonezawa, 2008), this study will only focus on such forms.

Table 1: *Gender indexes of common first-person singular Japanese pronouns, by intensity*

	Intensity			
	Delicate..Coarse			
Male	'watakushi'	'watashi'	'boku'	'ore'
Female	'watakushi'	'watashi'	'atashi'	

Not listed above, but nonetheless important to the discussion of this paper is the pronominal form, 'jibun'. Originally a self-reflexive pronoun, 'jibun' has more recently begun to be used as a 1PP, with Shibamoto and Smith (2003) classifying it as masculine and formal, traditionally associated with men in sports or militaristic groups (Kanamura, 1997, as cited in Abe, 2004). On the other hand, in a study investigating speech styles used at lesbian bars in Tokyo, Abe (2004) found that lesbians, especially those in their early twenties, highly favoured 'jibun' because they believed it most indexed gender neutrality. Given the insufficient research on this pronominal form, I will not attempt to position it among Table 1.

2.2 Normative Practices in Japanese L2 Classrooms

Students in Japanese L2 classrooms are made aware of Japanese first-person pronouns from the very start of their education, as one of the first things they learn is self-introductions. However, there are limitations in how students are invited to use these pronouns. For example, they are merely taught that 'watashi' is used by both boys and girls, and that 'boku' is only used by boys. Thus, learners recognize early on that pronoun selection in Japanese is based on social factors, yet this approach fails to convey the full extent of sociopragmatic complexity within the Japanese pronominal system. In a survey of seven popular

Japanese language textbooks, Siegal and Okamoto (2003) found that stereotypical differences in gendered speech styles and gender roles were overemphasised, and readers are given the impression that they must adhere to these prescriptivist rules. Additionally, Cook (2008) found that there was an oversimplification of 'polite' speech in beginner-level Japanese textbooks, implying that this style *only* conveys politeness, and failing to mention the highly situation-dependent metapragmatic considerations that must be accounted for during Japanese discourse. Expanding on this topic in the classroom would seem especially important English L1 students who are entirely unfamiliar with these types of speech style contrasts.

The powerful role that teachers assume within classrooms must also not be underestimated, as endowing such prescriptivist approaches and punishing colloquial ways of speaking runs the risk of deterring students away from their Japanese studies. The prevalence of traditional gender ideologies in Japanese society, even today, is not to be dismissed; however, given that the discourse practices of L1 speakers themselves clearly do not always obey those social expectations (Abe, 2004; Miyazaki, 2004; Okamoto, 1995), Japanese L2 instruction should effectively communicate the reality of the Japanese language. Recent literature has pointed out the utility of authentic teaching materials (Cook, 2008; Ohara et al., 2001; Yoshida, 2011) and advocated for critical pedagogy[1] (Brown & Cheek, 2017; Cook, 2008; Higgins, 2010; Kumagai & Sato; Moody, 2014; Ohara, 2011; Ohara et al., 2001) so that students may make informed linguistic choices vis-a-vis real L2 practices, and thus feel empowered in the L2 self that they are projecting.

3   Theoretical Framework

3.1   Second Language Socialisation

The study of language socialisation, as defined by Schieffelin and Ochs (1986, p. 167), 'has as its goal the understanding of how persons become competent members of social groups and the role of language in this process'. That being so, it is perhaps not hard to understand why research on L2 socialisation overwhelmingly focuses on speakers who have studied abroad, showing how this immersive environment can increase sociopragmatic competence (Dewaele & Regan, 2001; Iwasaki, 2010; Iwasaki, 2011), metapragmatic awareness (Kinginger & Farrell, 2004), and Japanese sociolinguistic competence (Cook, 2008; Hanaoka, 2020; Siegal, 1994; Siegal, 1996; Yoshida, 2011). At the same time, this literature generally fails to acknowledge an essential group of L2 speakers: those who have been socialised primarily in the classroom and have zero experience being immersed in L2 speech communities (this population will be broadly referred to as 'classroom learners' hereinafter). It is, needless to say, unrealistic for all L2 speakers to live in such immersive speech communities. Hence, the current study aims to present classroom learners as equally legitimate participators in language socialisation processes.

In a culture like Japan's, which prioritises social order and tradition, it has been argued that the goal of speakers is to adhere to Japanese social norms (Ide, 2012) where self-agency and self-expression are largely irrelevant in the appraisal of speech styles (Mishina, 1994). However, to assume this level of passiveness on part of the speaker would not account for the studies which showcase the often deliberate, non-conforming practices by Japanese L2 speakers, even in the face of L1 speakers who try to 'correct' their speech via explicit verbal socialisation (Brown & Cheek, 2017; Coomber, 2013; Iwasaki, 2010; Iwasaki, 2011; Kinginer & Farrell, 2004; Siegal, 1994). Siegal (1994) conducted an ethnographic longitudinal study on the study abroad experiences of four young adult women and found that they strategically constructed their speech styles vis-a-vis their personal views on Japanese gender ideologies.

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[1] See Ohara et al. (2001) for more discussion on how critical pedagogy may be implemented in an L2 Japanese classroom.

One speaker, for example, chose to adopt more masculine speech because she viewed the interactional behaviours of the Japanese women around her as 'shallow' (ibid., p. 335) and did not wish to portray herself in that way, even despite being chastised by other L1 female speakers. Indeed, L2 speakers are able to assume active learner roles, and the socialisation process is not merely a linear assimilation into L2 norms (Rampton, 1991). That being said, however, as classroom instruction alone largely fails to equip students with a robust sociopragmatic framework, the effect of prescriptivist ideologies and explicit socialisation on classroom learners' willingness to not conform warrants further investigation.

3.2   L2 Identity and the Relationality Principle

L2 language socialisation and L2 identity go hand in hand, as social identities are co-constructed and rooted in interaction (Ochs, 1993). Social identities are further discursively established via stances, defined by Ochs (1993, p. 288) as 'a display of a socially recognised point of view or attitude'. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) present a comprehensive analysis framework in an attempt to highlight such intersubjective aspects of identity. For the purposes of this study, I will be focusing specifically on their Relationality Principle, which calls to attention three complementary relations ('tactics of intersubjectivity') that inform and are created via identity construction:

(1) Adequation and Distinction stresses that two entities must only be situated as adequately (dis)similar for them to be positioned as (dis)alike (e.g., choosing a 1PP in Japanese because its gender indexes are viewed as most akin to your own gender identity)

(2) Authentication and Denaturalisation emphasises how identities are discursively verified/falsified, and how 'real' identity is a social process situated in interaction (e.g., using the same 1PP to index different social meanings depending on the immediate context)

(3) Authorisation and Illegitimatisation shows us how through institutionalised structures and ideologies, identities may be affirmed, dismissed, or even ignored (e.g., using a certain 1PP because academic institutions instructed you to).

Research has demonstrated that L2 Japanese speakers, both beginner and advanced, are very much active agents in constructing their L2 identity (Brown & Cheek, 2017; Iwasaki, 2010; Iwasaki, 2011; Ohara, 2001; Ohara, 2011; Siegal, 1994). They are able to strategically form speech styles based on their existing knowledge of how social meanings are indexed via linguistic forms, even those who come from dissimilar linguistic backgrounds such as English. However, research in the field of L2 identity, like that of L2 socialisation, widely focuses on speakers who have been lived fully immersed in the L2 (Higgins, 2011; Kumagai & Sato, 2009; Morita, 2004; Ohta, 1993; Pavlenko, 2001). This completely dismisses the experiences of classroom learners, even though classroom instruction arguably remains the norm for L2 acquisition. Moreover, in my survey of literature hitherto, I have come across zero studies that look specifically at the identity negotiation of classroom learners via 1PPs, even though pronouns are a particularly salient tool for identity construction in Japanese (Ide, 1979). Further considering the limitations of normative classroom practices, if students are only given a prescribed list of pronoun options, we must ask ourselves what happens when an individual does not identify with, nor wants to align with the L2 positionality they are subjecting themself to/being subjected to.

With the rapid globalisation of modern societies, increased exposure to media sources also becomes a rich source of authentic L1 input. Consequently, the opportunities to learn about and explore new L2

identities increase manifold, especially for those in restrictive classroom environments who would not have access to such identities otherwise (Ohara, 2011). That being said, the act of (re)positioning (Pavlenko, 2001) oneself amidst the new language is not always a frictionless process, even for those immersed in the L2. In fact, a common theme within Japanese L2 research is speakers who struggle to balance their 'foreigner' identity and its accompanying social expectations, with the L2 identity that aligns with their personal values and authentic self (Coomber, 2013; Iwasaki, 2010; Iwasaki, 2011; Ohta, 1993; Siegal, 1994; Yoshida, 2011). Coomber (2013) conducted semi-structured interviews with four male L2 speakers living in Japan and found that one speaker, despite being told by his wife that he matched the image of moderately-masculine 'boku', continued to use the more gender-neutral 'watashi', stating that using the other forms would feel as if he is 'artificially choosing the type of person [he wants] to be perceived as' (p. 177). These tensions are further complicated by learners' desire to position themselves as authentic users of Japanese, often altering their speech to legitimise themselves as competent speakers (Brown & Cheek, 2017; Ohara, 2001). From this, we can see that the act of choosing a pronoun is not always a simple projection of self-identity onto pronominal form, but rather the pronoun navigation process is one guided by an interaction of similarity, authentication, and authoritative axes. These relations ultimately allow the speaker to either align with their desired L2 identity, or align with the L2 identity that their immediate social group wants them to project.

At the nexus of language socialisation and L2 identity negotiation, lies the current study. To address the disparities outlined in this Section, the current paper is guided by the following research questions:

> **RQ1** – When L1 English learners of Japanese are faced with a differing system of first-person pronouns, how do they navigate this system and decide what pronoun to use, while remaining immersed in a predominantly English-speaking environment?
> **RQ2** – What connections, if any, can be drawn between their past experiences in the Japanese classroom and the stances they express toward pronouns, and their selection of first-person pronouns when using the language?

This study is not an investigation into the direct effects of classroom instruction on students' pronoun choice, nor does it assume that classroom instruction is their sole source of information on Japanese 1PPs. Rather, this is an investigation into the ways one's experiences in the Japanese L2 classroom may, or may not, influence their acquisition of pronouns and process of pronoun selection, inside and outside of the classroom, and beyond.

4 Methodology

4.1 Participants

Participants were recruited via word-of-mouth through classmates at my home university with whom I was enrolled in Japanese courses at the time of this study. They all consented to participate on an entirely voluntary basis, and the eligibility requirements were as follows: be an L1 speaker of English, be at an intermediate–advanced level of Japanese, have not lived in/attended school in Japan, and be in a predominantly English-speaking environment at home and school. In other words, participants had to be strictly L2 speakers of Japanese who have received classroom instruction for a prolonged amount of time (classroom learners). As the aim of this study was to investigate how participants' overall role and experiences as a classroom learner, not instructional content itself, may have influenced their pronoun choice, it was not necessary to control for the type or length of classroom instruction that they received.

Students with a higher level of proficiency were chosen for this study not to dismiss novice learners who could indeed very well identify with their L2 identity (Ohara, 2011), but the linguistic choices of advanced speakers may be more firmly rooted in personal ideologies vis-a-vis the L2 (Ohara, 2001), and hence, they were thought to be more capable of verbalising these stances. While a proficiency test was not administered, all participants were in the third or fourth year of their respective Japanese degree programs at the time of the study, of which upper-division language courses and thus advanced-level proficiency is required.

A total of five participants were selected; the lack of resources and fixed participation requirements resulted in this limited sample size. Nonetheless, diversified gender identity representation was strived for even among this smaller participant group. See Table 2 for a more detailed overview of the participants[2]. Their ages ranged from 20–23, with total years of Japanese classroom instruction ranging from 3 years (having only taken university-level classes) to 9 (having taken classes since middle school). At the time of this study, all participants were attending universities located on the west coast of the United States. Everyone's linguistic backgrounds consisted of only English (L1) and Japanese (L2)[3].

Table 2: *Overview of focus group participants*

	DEJAH	JESSICA	LAUREN	HUNTER	RYAN
Age	21	23	21	20	22
Gender	Non-binary	Female	Female	Male	Male
Race	Asian	White	Asian	Asian, White	Asian, White, Pacific Islander
Long-term residence	California	California	Hawai'i	Hawai'i	Hawai'i
Major	Japanese, Linguistics	Japanese	Japanese, Computer science	Japanese	Japanese
Years of Japanese classroom instruction	3	5.5	9	5	9
Non-classroom instruction	Clubs, tutoring, online videos/apps	Clubs, online videos/apps	Online videos/ apps	None	None
Primary 1PPs	'watashi', 'jibun'	'watashi'	'watashi'	'watashi', 'boku'	'watashi' (mainly) 'boku' (sometimes)
Main source of Japanese input	Friends, news, social media	Teachers, friends, TV	Friends, social media	Teachers	Teachers, friends, TV, social media

[2] All participant names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

[3] There are dialectal variations of Japanese self-referential forms (Fujiwara, 2000 as cited in Lee & Yonezawa, 2008). However, since all participants reported in the demographic survey that they do not speak any regional dialects, and as their most commonly used pronouns can all be described as Standard Japanese, the discussion of this paper does not expand on dialectal forms.

4.2   Data Collection

Data were collected in the form of a demographic survey and focus group. In addition to basic demographic information, the survey collected data on participants' Japanese language use and instructional history; participants completed this before the focus group. A single focus group was conducted on April 3 2022 and lasted approximately one hour. This method was chosen because group dynamics allow for a self-reflective environment and richer exchange of ideas; thus, topics can be explored in greater depth to uncover insights that may not have been verbalised without such interactional data (Ho, 2006). With this approach, 'the information obtained reflects the social and overlapping nature of knowledge better than a summation of individual narratives through interviews and surveys' (Nyumba et al., 2018, p. 29). Furthermore, as a focus group generates discussion 'without imposing a conceptual framework compared with a structured individual interview' (ibid., p. 29), it is particularly suited for tackling relatively unexplored areas of research, such as the topic of this current paper.

The current focus group was conducted entirely in English (except when stating Japanese pronouns). Combined with the small participant number, this ensured that each participant had their voice heard. A list of questions was made beforehand (see Appendix One), and the set and order of questions were largely adhered to during the actual focus group. I, acting as both the facilitator and moderator, was able to draw on my own experiences as an L2 Japanese speaker to encourage participants to voice their personal stories and create a friendlier atmosphere. The focus group was conducted entirely online via the video conferencing platform *Zoom*. Audio and video recordings were taken and participants consented to keep their cameras on throughout its duration, allowing for a more natural discussion and the nonverbal communication hallmark of an in-person, face-to-face (FTF) focus group. Studies that implement, or even studies that take a descriptive analytic approach to fully virtual focus groups are tremendously scarce, and rarer still within the field of sociolinguistics. One limitation to this method may be technological challenges due to the individual's lack of experience with virtual mediums; still, it has been shown that the amount of data richness produced in online audiovisual focus groups is chiefly similar to that of FTF (Abrams et al., 2014). Further, given that all participants were enrolled in classes conducted via *Zoom* for at least one full academic year due to the Coronavirus pandemic, they were assumed to be much more accustomed to online-synchronous interaction than previous literature may convey. Finally, as going fully virtual would widen the scope of my already limited target population, the benefits of this data collection method outweighed the potential limitations.

4.3   Analysis

After the focus group was conducted, the audio was transcribed verbatim with conventions adapted from Hepburn and Bolden (2013) and Higgins (2011) (see Appendix Two for full transcription conventions). Nonverbal cues were not analysed as they did not play a significant role in participants' accounts. This study took on a grounded approach and employed emic coding, where the themes were generated from participants' discourse (Saldaña, 2013). In prioritising participants' voices, salient codes were not determined by frequency, but rather were taken from the comments that participants themselves made salient during the focus group (e.g., via impactful word choice or emotive tone). When analysing the data under this approach, it became apparent that social identities and affective stances needed to be specifically addressed. These data were then further categorised into stances that allowed participants to (1) align or (2) disalign with their classroom instruction on 1PPs. Eight overall trends were then extracted (four from each (1) aligning and (2) disaligning stances) and one focus group excerpt that most explicitly illustrated each trend was chosen. Two out of the eight trends were further broken down into two sub-
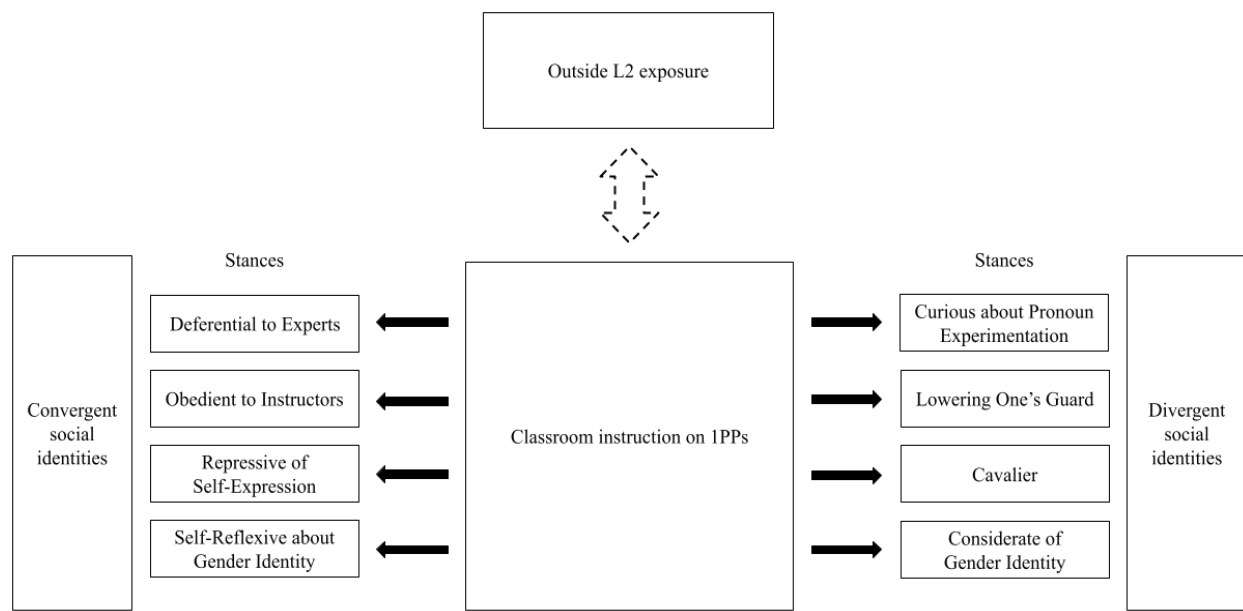
trends, and in these cases, one quote was selected per sub-trend. This made for a total of ten excerpts, or ten salient instances of stance-taking which summarised the overarching themes found in the data.

As this study took on a qualitative approach, it aimed for a holistic understanding of how this group of participants was able to make sense of the Japanese pronominal system, while taking into consideration their experiences as classroom learners. The tactics outlined in the Relationality Principle were referenced when exploring how different social relations may have influenced participants' pronoun selection. Their responses were examined against other participants', against various points in the focus group, and against the information collected via the demographic survey in order to extract comprehensive trends. Interesting insights were also gathered by looking at the interaction of learning experiences and social stances.

5   Findings

5.1   Mapping of Findings

Overall data findings are summarised in Figure 1. They will be further discussed throughout this section, with Figure 1 acting as a theoretical roadmap guiding the trajectory of this analysis. At the centre of the diagram, and focal to this current study, is Japanese 1PP learning experiences via classroom instruction. This is shown as an interaction with real-world learning experiences to account for the often intersecting and concurrent ways that these types of 'instruction' were found to shape the language socialisation of participants. Through these experiences, and stemming out from the centre of the diagram, are the stances that allowed participants to either discursively align or disalign with the pronoun choices taught to them in the classroom. These stances then inform participants' convergent or divergent social identities, ultimately assimilating to or challenging the 1PP teachings of instructors. The eight stances depicted correlate with the eight overall trends extracted from the data analysis, and their respective labels in Figure 1 are directly inspired by the 10 chosen excerpts, summarised into the specific stances participants displayed at that moment in time. The 10 quotes selected will guide the discussion in the following subsections.

Outside L2 exposure

Stances

Deferential to Experts

Obedient to Instructors

Repressive of Self-Expression

Self-Reflexive about Gender Identity

Convergent social identities

Classroom instruction on 1PPs

Stances

Curious about Pronoun Experimentation

Lowering One's Guard

Cavalier

Considerate of Gender Identity

Divergent social identities

Figure 1: *Mapping of aligning and disaligning stances in relation to instruction.*

Classroom experiences are represented as the starting point of participants' navigation process, precisely because this was where their first interactions with Japanese 1PPs took place. Defining such experiences serve as a necessary baseline for answering RQ2, and thus I will dedicate this paragraph to do just that. Similar to previous findings (Cook, 2008; Siegal & Okamoto, 2008), all participants in this study reported receiving very minimal instruction on 1PPs. Regardless of participants' varying geographical locations and levels of academic institutions, they reported that their classroom instructions predominantly centred around the notion that 'watashi' is for both boys and girls, and 'boku' is only for boys. This binary spectrum of 'watashi' and 'boku' is the classroom instruction that I refer to hereafter when describing participants as assuming an 'aligning' or 'disaligning' stance. Participants also noted that even in instances where 1PP variations were introduced (e.g., 'ore', 'atashi'), their copious indexical usages were not expanded upon. It was additionally clear from the data that albeit being classroom learners, outside exposure to the L2 (e.g., media, L1 speakers models) played an important role in the stance-takings of all participants by challenging what was being taught in the classroom. This interaction of real-world and classroom learning experiences thus necessitated a place in Figure 1. However, it should be noted that it is depicted as a dotted arrow, rather than a solid one, as it was not always made clear from the data whether or not participants' outside explorations directly affected, or were necessary for the production of the eight specific stances shown above.

5.1.1 Convergent Social Identities

The first aligning stance that I will discuss is labelled, 'Deferential to Experts', with experts being L1 speakers. This was the most common aligning stance, and it was one that I could further categorise into sub-stances: 'Scared' and 'Reticent'. Ryan frequently exhibited the 'Scared' variety and cited his awareness of Japanese sociolinguistic complexities as causing him to overthink his pronoun choice. Notably, when I asked participants whether or not they liked Japanese 1PPs, most participants responded

with mixed feelings, whereas Ryan never explicitly mentioned any positives and expressed a great deal of overwhelmingness and fear:

(1) Deferential to Experts: Scared

> Ryan: In Japan there's like, like kind of like this 'senpai-kohai' relationships and like, kind of like that vertical hierarchy in the way. So you kind of like need to be careful, like when you use like certain pronouns. So like you don't re-, like in a way like, 'watashi' is like the safest and 'boku', kind of like, maybe in the way creates like maybe a closeness, or something like that? But then I think like one time I also learned like, other pronouns like 'ore' can kind of come across as a little offensive in a way if, if you don't use it, like in the right context and the right situations.
> [...]
> So it's kind of a little, um, a little scary to like venture, venture out with like that proper like native knowledge, or like guidance, on how to use pronouns in different situations.

Defaulting to 'watashi' as a means of coping with sociopragmatic-related anxiety and confusion was also a strategy seen in Hanaoka (2020). Ryan goes on to note later in the focus group that he would like to experiment with other pronouns, but that his 'shy' and 'neutral' personality hinders this possibility, highlighting the effect of one's natural disposition in the construction of L2 identity.

Turning now to the other sub-stance, 'Reticent', Jessica exhibits reserve via a rather interesting avoidance strategy:

(2) Deferential to Experts: Reticent

> Jessica: I think I use 'watashi' in the hopes that it won't cause any perceptions that I don't want there.
> [...]
> I think that just the, the amount of times I'll use 'watashi' in a sentence definitely shows that I'm not a native speaker because I'm always tryna like denote, like "I'm talking about me here." Um, in that regard, it could be like, 'Oh my gosh, she's so self-centred, always using this pronoun all the time.' Like maybe, I don't know. But yeah, I think I, I almost want it to not say anything at all about me because we want to avoid the assumptions made by other ones.

Jessica experiences dissonance between the way she wants to be perceived (unmarked) and the way she thinks she is being perceived by L1 speakers (marked as a non-native speaker). However, this dissonance is created unintentionally, as it is her English background, which requires overtly-marked pronouns, that consequently leads to her uncontrollable/unconscious (over)use of 1PPs in Japanese. Giving unnecessary information (e.g., overtly marking the subject) is a sign of clumsiness in Japanese (Maynard, 1997, as cited in SturtzSreetharan, 2009), yet trying to adhere to these interactional norms as an L2 speaker can result in sociolinguistic inappropriateness for those who do not yet have complete control of the language (Siegal, 1996). In Excerpt (2), then, it is the act of using pronouns itself that risks exposing Jessica's identity as an incompetent speaker, and she opts to use 'watashi' as a counteractive measure, similar to how Ryan reasoned that 'watashi' was the 'safest' choice as an L2 speaker. Thus, their decision to use 'watashi' is motivated by both a desire to fit in with L2 norms and as a means of deflecting attention away from their 'foreigner' identity; in Excerpts (1) and (2), it is the use of the term 'native' that relationally positions Ryan and Jessica as outsiders, inferior to the authoritative power of L1 experts.

The second aligning stance is labelled, 'Obedient to Instructors'. Jessica identifies a new type of authoritative power in Excerpt (3), that is, the hegemonic academic institution, and squarely positions

herself against instructors, rather than general L1 experts. It is worthy to note that while Japanese language instructors may very well be L1 speakers, this is not something to be assumed; instructors will be discussed here as merely representative of larger institutionalised powers in the context of academia.

(3) Obedient to Instructors

> Jessica: Something that I kind of felt that I wish was a little different when we were being taught it, was like, there are all these pronouns, but there is like a limit to what we were allowed to use in class almost? Like, the way that it's taught like, for example if I was taking like an exam and I needed to write a sentence in a certain like, situation, um, like I dunno, like you're, doing an interview or something and like address the, introduce yourself to the speaker or something like that. It'd almost be like, well I feel like I have to use this pronoun or I'm going to get the question wrong because this isn't how it was taught to me and what's appropriate.

As a follow-up to Excerpt (3), I asked the group if anyone else has had an experience similar to Jessica's. It was then Lauren who notably remarked that while the learner would have more pronoun agency when interacting with speakers outside of the classroom, it is the teacher who both influences and restricts the learner inside of the classroom. Hence, Jessica's choice to align is no longer motivated by a desire to establish legitimacy as a Japanese speaker, but rather a desire to succeed as a student. When considering the broader academic institution, it would be over-simplistic to denote this as passive obedience, for the maintaining of face (Goffman, 1967) via alignment with institutional authority can have significant consequences on one's academic and professional career. If the L2 learner is predominantly socialised in the classroom, then, these findings suggest that the influence of the institution itself may be the most salient factor in determining a convergent social identity.

The fourth aligning stance is labelled, 'Repressive of Self-Expression', and as Jessica further exhibits, one can take on multiple stances depending on the matter at hand. When proposed the hypothetical situation, 'In this focus group right now, if we were speaking Japanese, what pronoun would you use?', Jessica was able to critically apply her understanding of Japanese discourse practices:

(4) Repressive of Self-Expression

> Jessica: In a focus group, like an academic focus group I think that 'watashi' is just like appropriate. I think 'atashi' would be, I don't know, I'm not even sure exactly why, but it just doesn't seem right. Maybe it's, cause it's not the time to like, project femininity, like, in this setting. Do you know what I mean? Like, there are times like maybe if I was out like, doing something cute, I'd want to use 'atashi', but here it's like, it's a formal like thing where that part of me, part of my identity isn't relevant. So I think 'watashi' is just kind of almost like more plain, and therefore appropriate.

Jessica earlier noted that the only times she uses 'atashi', if at all, is in extremely casual or joking settings with friends, showing that at the same time she exists as an obedient student, she is also a Japanese speaker keenly aware of sociopragmatic concerns. In Excerpt (4), however, her decision to not use 'atashi' is not grounded in the fact that 'atashi' is informal; rather, it is the fact that 'atashi' is marked for femininity, and when speaking Japanese in formal settings, one should instead aim to project a 'plain' identity. Thus, she is able to evaluate the immediate context and decide the social indexes upon which to base her pronoun choice. Unlike Excerpt (3), she is no longer opting for 'watashi' out of compliance with

institutional powers; this is a conscious, selective restriction of self-identity stemming from advanced sociolinguistic understanding in the L2, in the act of maintaining face.

The final stance that I will discuss in this section is labelled as 'Self-reflexive about Gender Identity.' Hunter exhibited this stance-taking as he contemplated between pronominal forms 'ore' and 'boku':

(5) Self-Reflexive about Gender Identity

> Hunter: I was looking at like stuff online, like apps and stuff like that too. And then it was saying 'ore' was more like masculine and I don't really think I would classify myself as that? I would just stick to like 'boku'.

Here, the influence of L2 media is unmistakable: It introduces Hunter to a new pronoun option, 'ore', yet it is precisely because of this that Hunter continues to use 'boku' because exposure to media created an opportunity for him to be self-reflexive about his masculinity and the L2 identity he wanted to project. The interaction of media and classroom instruction, however, is not always as frictionless as Excerpt (5) may depict. For example, Hunter also described the first time he heard a female using 'boku' when he was watching an 'anime': Because of the way that 'boku' was presented in class, he assumed that it was used only by males, leading him to be thoroughly perplexed when the female character used it, even going on to question if she was actually a man. The reason for Hunter's confusion is precisely his experiences as a classroom learner, for if he was not taught a binary spectrum of merely 'watashi' and 'boku', he would not have such a constrained impression of Japanese pronouns in the first place. This highlights the ways that narrow-scope instruction may actually hinder students' acquisition processes, if every interaction with authentic L2 input utterly contradicts what they were taught in the classroom up until that point. For Hunter, what could have been a normal media interaction was a fundamental breakthrough in his understanding of Japanese. This type of confusion, caused by a disparity between L2 practices in the media versus in the classroom, was a prominent trend throughout the focus group. Therefore, it can be generalised that participants' experiences as classroom learners significantly influenced their pronoun selection, even beyond classroom walls; and, that L2 media plays a key role in the socialisation process of classroom learners as it introduces them to authentic discourse practices.

5.1.2 Divergent Social Identities

The first disaligning stance is labelled, 'Curious about Pronoun Experimentation,' and is further broken down into sub-stances 'Cautious' and 'Frustrated'. This highly salient and affective stance-taking would occur when participants expressed their interest in exploring non-normative 1PPs, and notably, Excerpts (6) and (7) come as Lauren's and Jessica's response to my question of whether or not they have ever encountered any challenges when using 1PPs. This is perhaps symbolic of the fact that participants' desires to experiment were often followed by feelings of caution, disappointment, and frustration, a phenomenon not entirely uncommon among Japanese learners as a whole (Yoshida, 2011).

Again showcasing the powerful role of L2 media, it was Lauren who first communicated her desires to try non-normative 1PPs within the first six minutes of the focus group: Through YouTube videos, she was exposed to the pronoun 'ore', yet as most of the YouTubers were male, she felt that she was not allowed to use 'ore' even though it seemed very 'fun.' Excerpt (6) describes her contradicted feelings towards using another 1PP not commonly taught in the classroom, 'atashi':

(6) Curious about Pronoun Experimentation: Cautious

> Lauren: For example, 'atashi', like the way that's perceived, like whenever I hear it in like, um, these are like dramas or like show settings, but whenever like a character would use it, it would be like a super duper like really really cute or a flirty girl. And I'm like, 'I don't know if I want to be perceived as <u>tha:t</u>.' But there's also settings for like, you know, like other girls use it too, but it's like, what are they gonna, you know, what is the immediate perception of me using this in this situation?

In Excerpt (1), Ryan also exhibited hesitancy deriving from fears of projecting an undesirable image of himself; however, that positionality resulted in fear and deference, whereas Lauren continues to inquire about and use non-normative forms. One rationale for this divergence might lie in their overall attitudes towards the Japanese pronominal system. As mentioned earlier, when I asked participants whether or not they liked Japanese 1PPs, most expressed mixed feelings, and Ryan was the only one who failed to mention any positives. By direct contrast, Lauren was the only one who announced, 'I like Japanese pronouns. Straight out.' It can be argued then that strong positive attitudes towards Japanese pronouns correlate positively with stances that allow the learner to disalign with classroom teachings.

The second sub-stance is labelled as 'Frustrated', with Jessica relaying her desires to experiment through her exasperations with narrow-scope classroom instruction:

(7) Curious about Pronoun Experimentation: Frustrated

> Jessica: I don't recall who said it, but one of us in this focus group was like, there are so many that I like want to try using just because they seem kind of fun. And I felt like I shouldn't use a lot of them, learning like from books and also just from my professors being like, 'Don't use that, that sounds weird.' But I'm like, 'Well, why not? It's kind of, it's kinda cool.' So, I don't think that's a challenge, but maybe just something I was like a little bit, sad about maybe?

While Jessica effectively displayed convergent identities in Excerpts (2), (3), and (4), it is evident from Excerpt (7) that she is in fact still eager to experiment and diverge from classroom teachings. One's L2 identity is not static; it is rooted in interaction. Likewise, the factors which influence identity construction may also take on different roles when we look at these scenarios via different scale points. For example, it was institutional authority that led to Jessica's obedience in Excerpt (3), yet also her resistance in Excerpt (7); and looking more closely at the type of academic context, we find that Excerpt (7) refers to general classroom interactions, while Excerpt (3) refers to test-taking scenarios in which the salience of institutionalised authority and desire to maintain face is arguably much greater. Thus, it is not hard to see how the settings that occasion learner deference may also occasion defiance, as these identities are constructed via distinctive degrees of authorisation relations.

The second disaligning stance that I will discuss is labelled, 'Lowering One's Guard'. Lauren said early in the focus group that she sometimes uses 'oretachi' (the plural form of 'ore') when hanging out with male friends. But, she later expressed her hesitancy towards using the singular form of 'ore', which I then questioned her about:

(8) Lowering One's Guard

> Liv: Have you ever used 'ore' when talking just about yourself?
> Lauren: I guess it would depend on the person. Um, if they kind of knew like, how I already am and like, we're kind of just like long time friends then I guess I would if like, kind of joking around or having fun? But not to someone who I don't know that well.

Lauren was more likely to use this highly-masculine form when talking to close friends, not necessarily as a way of indexing familiarity and playfulness, but because it is in these intimate settings that she feels able to express these social meanings and not create any off-putting perceptions of herself. Similarly, Ryan mentions that only if he had a close group of Japanese-speaking friends, would he feel comfortable exploring more masculine pronoun options such as 'boku' and 'ore'. This is not because he wishes to project a masculine identity only around close friends, but rather because the repercussions of creating a potentially marked gender identity are less severe in casual settings (again touching upon their knowledge of Japanese interactional norms). Thus, the choice to use marked pronouns does not always directly stem from a desire to index masculinity/femininity or familiarity among interlocutors; sometimes, the immediate social dynamics are judged to be more tolerant of L2 speakers who merely wish to explore new L2 positionalities, especially by those who have already grown acculturated to confining classroom environments. When Lauren and Ryan use coarser pronouns only in intimate settings, it is a symbolic authentication, and exploration, of such identities that allow them to lower their guard when speaking Japanese.

These smaller social groups allow for more nuanced settings even within otherwise seemingly monolithic structures, such as the classroom. For example, L2 speakers may limit themselves to 'watashi' and 'boku' when assuming the role of student, and at the same time, may use 'ore' when assuming the role of classmate or friend. Even Hunter, who previously noted that he did not identify with the gender indexes of 'ore', later mentioned that he occasionally used 'ore' when talking to his friend in class. It is the immediate context that determines what factor(s) become most salient in pronoun choice and suggests 'the rhetorical flexibility [people] have to position themselves in different ways at different moments for different purposes' (Abe, 2004, p. 211).

The third stance, labelled as 'Cavalier', comes in contrast to all previous excerpts, with Dejah expressing high modality in choosing 'jibun' as her preferred pronoun:

(9) Cavalier

> Dejah: I feel pretty comfortable using what I, I use.
> [...]
> Um, I'm just like, eh, if I used 'jibun' and they think it's wrong then I'm just like, whatever. It's like, it has enough overlap, there, I'm just like, I don't care.

The phrases 'whatever' and 'I don't care' are especially reflective of, and performative of their cavalier stance. Another characteristic that sets Dejah apart from the other participants is their passion for pronouns, even stating that they investigated the indexical usages and history of Japanese 1PPs on their own time. It is important to note, however, that in addition to being a Japanese major, Dejah is the only participant with a Linguistics background as well, keeping in mind the potential effect that this could have had on their L2 understanding and consequently L2 self-confidence. Even considering this, however, it seems important to once again call attention to the influence of natural disposition on L2 identity. Ryan

was another participant who displayed sociolinguistic awareness in Excerpt (1), yet his shy personality frequently results in hesitation when speaking Japanese, a direct contrast to Dejah's cavalier stance. Jessica also demonstrates sociolinguistic competence in Excerpts (3) and (4), yet she never displays modality to the extent of Dejah's. Therefore, it may be argued that sociolinguistic competence does not correlate with levels of L2 self-confidence, nor whether one assumes a disaligning or aligning stance. Even with similar classroom experiences, the language socialisation processes of classroom learners can significantly differ nonetheless, in which the influence of personal factors must not be overlooked.

Another factor to consider in the construction of L2 identity, is gender identity. As discussed in Excerpt (5), a self-reflexive stance towards gender identity may lead to alignment with classroom teachings. However, using 1PPs as an adequation of gender identity may instead lead to non-convergence, as Dejah shows us in this final disaligning stance called, 'Consideration of Gender Identity':

(10) Considerate of Gender Identity

> Dejah: When I use 'jibun', it's not as a reflexive pronoun. I typically use it, well, I mean, I do use it in the reflexive, as a reflexive pronoun, but also as a personal pronoun. Um, because it, it does denote kind of more gender neutral- I guess it indexes more gender or gender neutralness and like non-binary-ness or queerness.

Here, unlike Excerpt (5), a consideration of gender identity is no longer a mere by-product of exposure to new pronominal forms; instead, gender identity is the consideration upon which Dejah chooses her 1PP. Stating that it denotes gender neutrality, their interpretation of 'jibun' precisely aligns with the findings of Abe (2004). Interestingly, however, Dejah also mentions in the focus group that, due to the frequent use of zero subjects in Japanese, her use of 1PPs becomes a form of emphasis and focus, rather than a means of indexing gender or formality. If this is the case, then perhaps the indexical meanings upon which one chooses a pronoun, are not always the same indexical values upon which one negotiates identity in real-time discourse. In other words, even though Dejah recognises 'jibun' as her preferred pronoun because of its gender indexes, other meta-linguistic phenomena may take prominence when using 'jibun' in actual speech. This is a clear example of identity authentication, as 'jibun' serves to construct Dejah's L2 identity by taking on the indexical values they themself wish to make salient in the present discourse.

In line with existing literature on L2 identity construction (Coomber, 2013; Iwasaki, 2010; Ohara, 2001; Ohara, 2011; Siegal, 1994; Siegal 1996; Yoshida, 2011), the participants in this present study were very much active social agents in their navigations of Japanese pronouns. Rather than choosing pronominal forms which merely projected the L2 selves they identify with, or the formality indexes that are most appropriate for a given context, the findings suggest that such a straightforward one-to-one mapping is not always the case and that the indexical meaning(s) of pronouns may arise from, or change as a consequence of the pronominal form and social setting itself. As discussed through Excerpts (8) and (10), Japanese 1PPs may be chosen as a means of identity authentication at the same time they act as identity adequation, where the set of indexes embedded in a certain form may not always be the indexical values that speakers' wish to project in actual discourse as other social meanings or goals become more salient. Moreover, the immediate social environment alone may authenticate one's desire to simply explore a new form, notably, without much personal attachment to the form itself. Whereas previous studies have depicted the linguistic choices by L2 speakers as heavily grounded in reasoning, where the decision to use a certain pronoun is a direct consequence of previous learning experiences and/or the self-reflexive states brought on by such experiences (Coomber, 2013; Hanaoka, 2020), the current findings unveil a complementary, rather light-hearted decision-making process, that is, wishing to use a pronoun because it seems 'cool' and 'fun'. Such a stance, seeming to exist irrelevant of participants' background,

is perhaps a phenomenon familiar to classroom learners who have continued to be restricted by academic institutions, while still being exposed to outside L1 sources that challenge the scope of such narrow instruction. In these cases, prior to and more salient than a strong level of identification with the pronominal form comes a simple desire to get acquainted with the form for themselves, the version of the form that exists outside of the classroom. This additionally points to the authoritative powers of instructors and academic institutions in shaping L2 identity negotiation, which appears to take prominence over other identity relations when looking at the L2 socialisation processes of classroom learners as a whole.

5.2   The Influence of Non-Nativeness on L2 Identity

Given the above findings, there still remains one theme that was critical to the L2 identity construction of all participants: the dichotomisation between themself, the 'non-native foreigner speaker,' and 'expert native speakers'. When I asked Hunter about the ways in which he thought other Japanese speakers perceive him, rather than commenting on one of the many social indexes tied to 1PPs, he seems more concerned about his positionality as a non-native speaker:

(11) Non-native foreigner speaker identity

      Liv: What are some assumptions you think other speakers make about you based on the pronoun yo use?

      Hunter: Maybe you're like, or like almost still a learner of Japanese, not like fluent or anything? So like kind of like, 'Oh, he's kind of like using like maybe like basics' or something like that, and not like, using like, stuff that'd be like normally used in a Japanese speaking environment.

Previous studies have showcased L2 speakers who do not heavily associate with their Japanese self and view parts of this identity as ingenuine to their true character (Coomber, 2013; Iwasaki, 2011; Siegal, 1994), suggesting that speakers regard their L2 and L1 selves as rather independent from each other. By contrast, when participants were asked if the ways they expressed themselves in English differed from Japanese, none expressed detachment or heavy identification with either language. Nor did they comment that their positionalities in either language felt performative or inauthentic, implying that their L1 and L2 identities are viewed as one 'self'. Nonetheless, while participants did not outright reject their positionality as a 'non-native speaker', it was a component that they did not wish to call attention to, despite being highly salient, as previously discussed in Excerpts (1) and (2). This can be linked to a keen desire to fit in and maintain positive face, which when analysed vis-a-vis group membership dynamics plays a key role in being accepted by L1 speaker communities and increasing sociolinguistic competence (Iwasaki, 2011). All participants agreed that their choice of pronoun would change if they were to live in Japan citing the reason for increased exposure to L1 models, not with a desire to imitate such models, but because they thought hearing how pronouns are used in authentic discourse would allow them to feel more confident in their own pronoun choices. Their goal as speakers of Japanese was to develop high enough sociopragmatic competence to where they are capable of freely using non-normative practices in an unmarked way; and still, this statement relies on one key assumption: that being an L2 speaker inherently taints their legitimacy as users of Japanese.

      The fact that these participants are L2 speakers is something that, needless to say, remains true regardless of their proficiency levels. It is the fact that they view this part of their identity as a flaw, as something to deflect attention away from, that is problematic, and what is more so, the institutions and

ideologies that have engendered upon them this belief. The continued prevalence of the 'native speaker' construct in L2 classrooms is an area of concern within the field Second Language Acquisition. This doctrine relies on the belief that 'nativeness' is a birthright and ultimately out of the speaker's control (Cook, 1999), which means that L2 speakers' 'battle to become native speakers is lost before it has begun' (ibid., p.204). This may cause learners to feel a sense of defeat, which, in fact, was a sentiment tremendously prevalent throughout the current data set. In actuality, the linguistic repertoire of L1 and L2 speakers exists on a non-binary spectrum, and discourse practices by L2 speakers are not any less valid than those by L1 counterparts. Thus, I urge Japanese language instructors to reflect on their pedagogical approaches and materials, asking themselves if students are being reprimanded for 'non-normative' discourse practices merely because of their status as a 'non-native', or if students are allowed to exercise self-agency in the construction of their desired L2 self. Just as L2 instructors are capable of hindering students' classroom performance, they are also capable of empowering students to negotiate more liberating positionalities (Morita, 2004).

6   Implications

Previous research on second language socialisation has argued that sociolinguistic competence (Dewaele & Regan, 2001; Iwasaki 2010; Siegal, 1996) and metapragmatic awareness (Kinginger & Farrell, 2004) primarily emerge from full immersion contexts. However, the current findings imply that this is not the case, as participants were keenly aware of the indexes tied to non-normative pronouns and were able to apply that knowledge in discursively navigating such choices. Through the assistance of outside exposure to the L2, it is possible for classroom learners to attain high levels of sociolinguistic competence, even while remaining immersed in English. The findings also show that, parallel to how explicit verbal socialisation plays a key role in the socialisation processes for those living immersed in L2 communities (Brown & Cheek, 2017; Cook, 2008; Coomber, 2013; Siegal, 1994), explicit verbal instruction is a fundamental part of classroom learners' socialisation processes as well. Jessica even stated that she tends to opt for 'watashi' because that is what she 'was taught to do from the very beginning of [her] Japanese education.' Therefore, it seems important to further explore the ways in which one's initial classroom experiences can have long-term implications on one's choice of 1PP, and thus on one's L2 identity throughout the entire acquisition process.

Given the saliency of explicit instruction and institutional powers in the identity construction of classroom learners of Japanese, it is not hard to see how prescriptivist pedagogical approaches become daunting for the student, especially if we consider the factor of natural disposition. For speakers like Ryan, for example, who naturally assume a shy demeanour and use words such as 'overwhelming' and 'scary' to describe L2 identity negotiation, prescriptivist approaches would only increase levels of reticence. Notably, it is not the act of presenting students with discursive options that feels overwhelming; in fact, learners feel liberated when they possess such a toolkit to negotiate their identity (Cook, 2008; Moody, 2014). Rather, it is when instructors punish non-normative practices and colloquial ways of speaking that potentially risk discouraging students from pursuing Japanese altogether (Ohara, 2011). Especially when the reality of L1 linguistic practices itself is non-conforming,

> 'Failure to observe a normative usage [by L2 speakers] is no longer seen as a violation of social rules… Rather, when learners do not choose the normative usage, they are understood to be indexing social meanings different from those of the norm' (Cook, 2008, p. 194)

This study, therefore, assumes the argument overwhelmingly made by recent literature, that is, a need for critical pedagogy, which informs and empowers, rather than dictates and controls.

7   Conclusion

This paper has examined the ways in which L2 Japanese speakers' process of pronoun selection is influenced by their classroom experiences, and from this, the stances and correlating intersubjective tactics which inform their pronoun choices. This was an exceptionally small-scale investigation and is by no means transferable beyond the specific conditions of this account. I must also recognise several of its limitations, the first of which is its reliance on self-reported data. Without also collecting spontaneous conversation data, I am not able to corroborate if participants' reports on pronoun usage are actually reflected in their discourse; such data would seem important in an investigation of discursive identity negotiation. Secondly, the circumstances which necessitated me to juggle both roles of group facilitator and moderator might have very well hindered the scope of depth with which I was able to probe participants' responses for further elaboration. By way of contrast, however, everyone in the focus group was acquaintances with me and/or at least one other participant, allowing for a more laid-back and intimate setting, in which the extent of participants' frankness and openness in their responses is believed to have further added to the trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of this report.

Building upon previous studies (Brown & Cheek, 2017; Iwasaki, 2010; Iwasaki, 2011; Ohara, 2001; Ohara, 2011; Siegal, 1994), the current findings further exemplify that L2 Japanese speakers are very much active agents in the construction of their L2 identity, and that:

> 'At the same time as they exist as learners of a foreign/second language working to achieve proficiency in Japanese, they also remain rational and interpretive social beings who base their decisions not only on a desire to emulate L1 speakers of Japanese.' (Ohara, 2001, p. 242)

Using the concepts outlined in Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) Relationality Principle, participants were shown to use 1PPs as a means of both identity adequation and identity authentication while simultaneously navigating the authoritative powers that manifest from specific social dynamics. The saliency of each such relationality force was highly contextual and also influenced by personal factors such as gender identity, natural disposition, and overall attitude towards Japanese pronouns. At the foundation of these exchanges were the various learning experiences that pragmatically conditioned subsequent interactions with the L2, and also the foreigner–expert dichotomy that led to 'non-nativeness' being an extricable, governing part of participants' L2 identity. It is from this nexus that participants were able to assume either an aligning or disaligning stance.

This study serves to fill existing gaps in L2 acquisition research, particularly by shining a light on the voices of classroom learners. There is a demand for critical pedagogy to support students in the negotiation of their L2 identity, where their linguistic choices as L2 speakers, normative or not, are no longer perceived as impinging on their legitimacy as users of Japanese. More research is needed to explore the full potential of L2 media in developing high sociolinguistic competence, the effect of language proficiency levels on L2 identity negotiation, the long-term effects of narrow-scope classroom instruction on the overall L2 socialisation journey of speakers who continue to remain immersed in their L1.

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9 Appendices

9.1 Appendix One: Focus Group Questions

When necessary, what first-person pronoun do you use when speaking Japanese? Why?

How did you first learn about Japanese 1PPs?

Are there any specific experiences that influenced your choice of pronoun?

Has your choice of pronoun changed as you became more proficient in Japanese?

With English as a native language, is it difficult to navigate the Japanese pronoun system? Are there times when this system feels more comfortable because you're able to further express politeness, gender identity, etc.?

Do you think this pronoun system is more of a good or bad thing?

What are some challenges you've encountered while learning or using Japanese pronouns?

If you use multiple pronouns, in what scenarios do they differ?

What are some assumptions you think other speakers make about you based on the pronoun you use?

Do you think the way you express yourself in English is the same as in Japanese?

Would your choice of pronoun change if you were living in Japan?

9.2 Appendix Two: Transcription Conventions

'talk'   constructed dialogue or reported speech
<u>talk</u>   emphasis
ta:lk   sound prolongation
.   falling intonation
?   rising intonation
,   continuing intonation
-         cut-off speech

[...]   text deleted

About the Author

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