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Speaking of Competence: Lived Experiences of Language in Japan

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Nun, die Sprache greift ja auch in mein Leben ein. Und was »Sprache« heißt ist ein Wesen bestehend aus heterogenen Teilen und die Art und Weise wie sie eingreift unendlich mannigfach. (Wittgenstein 1973: 66)

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1 Introduction: When Speaking of Competence

1.1 I feel that I'm competent

This thesis is about immigrants' lived experiences of language competence in contemporary Japan. I explore the experiences of a few individuals, mostly with either an Austrian or German background. I showcase examples from stories in which they tell me about their experiences, particularly in interactions with other speakers of Japanese and how they make sense of these experiences. They are defined as *L2 users of Japanese* (Japanese-as-a-second language), meaning that they acquired Japanese at a later stage in life through formal education, informal socialization with other speakers of Japanese, and exposure to Japanese media.

I begin this investigation with an example to illustrate my approach to *analyzing discourse*, the central technique in this thesis. It is about a short segment of talk where someone speaks about their perceptions of competence in Japanese. This example illustrates some aspects where proficiency, skills, abilities, capabilities with respect to language use are at stake in retrospective reflection. The following extract is taken from an interview conducted in spring 2024 with Jun,[1] an American Korean professional working at an international company in Tokyo. I ask Jun about how they[2] perceive their competence in Japanese depending on the settings in which they use it, at home with their partner, and at work.

Extract 1.1: The line is a lot blurred now

01	Jun:	i think that the line is a lot blurred, [now,]
02	Florian:	[mhm.] okay.
03	Jun:	that i::, ((1,0))
04		i feel that i'm competent^{h} in both:: (.) the private setting, =
05	Florian:	=mhm.
06	Jun:	*dim/acc* and: professional setting.

[1] All names are either self-chosen or pseudonyms that I assigned.

[2] Pronouns are self-chosen.

07 Florian: okay=
08 Jun: =in japanese.=
09 Florian: =↑°good.°

Jun tells me about their competence perceptions of Japanese. Jun is married to a Japanese and uses only Japanese with him. Jun tells me, "that the line is a lot blurred" (line 1). The line is a boundary between perceived competences in private and professional settings (lines 4 & 6).

A brief analysis of this short segment shall illustrate the overall interest and approach I pursue in this thesis. First, we can identify some *indexical expressions*—expressions that guide our interpretation of the social action occurring here (Wortham & Reyes 2021). Competence is something that we *think* or deliberate about (line 1), in this context when directly asked about it. Competence is something toward which we direct our emotions, something we *feel* (line 4). Jun uses the expression "setting" as an anchor of contextual orientation. In settings, domains of competences are differentiated, such as private or professional in this segment (lines 4 & 6, see also Gal 2005). Depending on contexts, competences may be alternatively perceived and performed. However, such lines may be "blurred" (line 1). Competence articulations sit in domains and reflexively mark their relationship to these realms, in more or less explicit or perceivable ways to an audience. Delineations are thus situated on a range of *transparency* and *opacity*. This thesis examines how speakers reflect on issues related to competence in various domains and registers. Importantly, though I focus on L2 users of Japanese, my interlocutors discuss their experiences and compare Japanese, English, and German.

Blurred lines between perceived competences can also be located on a range of *intensity*, such as "a lot" (line 1), indicating that Jun has a *comparative ground* in mind onto which they can project the outlines of contrasts. Contrasts thus become more or less visible when speakers employ *axes of comparison* (Irvine & Gal 2000). While settings are often understood in spatial terms—such as the home or the workplace—time is another anchor to ground a momentary expression of competence perceptions. Jun uses the deictic "now" (line 1) that adumbrates a temporal relation to something that was before. The lines could have been drawn differently in the past. Thus, we see that speakers' perceptions of lines may shift over time.

Second, we can consider expressions that contextualize the development of interactional trajectories and dynamics of talk. In this extract, Jun and I use English with each other, as in

most of our conversations. Jun remained in Japan and built a professional career in the education sector after we graduated from the same MA program. Our *involvement* (Tannen 2005 [1984]) and established *rapport* (Goebel 2019c, 2021), in other words, our degree of intimacy in this conversation is reflected in *overlaps* (lines 1–2) and frequent *latched turns* (lines 4–5 & 7–9).[3] I approximate the dynamics of talk marking emphasis on words, modulations of pace and amplitude, indicated with *acc*/*dim*, or the softer voice on °good°.[4] I also mark changes in voice register, such as a higher pitch ↑. A perceivable /t/-release on "competent^{h}" (line 4) marks Jun's careful enunciation in the interview context and maybe emphatic stance toward their knowledge of Japanese (see Eckert 2008: 467–471 on some interpretations of /t/-release in American English). Jun has cultivated this knowledge over the years of using Japanese in different contexts. These phonetic cues reveal how speakers dynamically highlight elements in ongoing talk to guide the listeners' interpretation of their speech (Gumperz 1982). I will show that we can identify some recurring patterns and communicative cues that my interlocutors draw on when talking about their experiences to *draw us into the scene of their narration* (Ochs 2012, see also Section 3.5.2 in the Theory Chapter).

Talking about competence is making the language capabilities that we think we have explicit. It unfolds in *sequences* that are part of larger segments or embeddings in nearly infinite contextualizations (see Section 4.3.3 in the Methods Chapter for details). Speaking about competence in Japanese is embedded not only in the interview frame. It is embedded in larger structures of speaking about competence in other areas of everyday life—such as with the partner at home who might use another language, or with colleagues and clients at an international, multilingual company. Speaking about competence in and across languages is also embedded in discourses about people and their putative language competence. And discourses are framed with the valorizations and expectations that languages and speakers receive in communities. We therefore need some contextualization of individuals' background, their pathways, and the social conditions under which they embark on such pathways (and I briefly review some tendencies for the case of Japan in Chapter 2). For example, Jun grew up in the Midwest of the USA, took Japanese language classes at university,

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[3] The transcription conventions are outlined in the Appendix, Section A.

[4] I interpret my use of "good" here as an expression of me registering Jun's answer in the interview frame, rather than positive judgment or appreciation that is typically associated with this appraisal expression (Martin & White 2005).

and later moved to Japan to enter graduate school in Tokyo. They settled and have been staying there since, building a career in multilingually operating corporations. In their work life, one of their tasks is to translate and interpret between English and Japanese. Jun works with languages on a professional level.[5] There is competence *in* a language as well as competence that transverses different languages in the portfolio of a person (i.e., a *repertoire* in the sense of Gumperz 1964; Busch 2012b, 2017; see Theory Chapter Section 3.5.2). Competence is also embedded in questions of *mobility*. For example, knowing a language is a resource for finding work in a new place, as it broadens options. At the same time, competences are subject to standardized measures and assessments that enable or foreclose access to certain institutions of social life (see, for example, Flubacher et al. 2018; Kubota & Takeda 2021).

Lastly, competences are often purported as individual capabilities that are, as I will show in this thesis, better understood as a more dynamic and collective way of expressing language knowledge and understanding in concert with other humans—in ongoing interaction as well as retrospective reflection. But most importantly, competence is part of an individual's *lived experience* of the world. And it flows into the myriads of interactions that inhabit this world. Lived experience is mediated through instances of language use across contexts, times, spaces, and relations (Busch 2021 [2013]). We can only gain a fractured glimpse of Jun's lived experience and how they interpret this with context in mind. These contexts include, for example, their workplace (as a time-space), their interactions with colleagues, their partner at home, and with friends.

This example illustrates only some aspects of competence in relation to language, variously called *language competence*, *linguistic competence*, or *communicative competence* in sociolinguistic, linguistic anthropological, or applied linguistic literature. These are concepts that I will disentangle later (Theory Chapter Section 3.5). The example from my conversation with Jun gives just a brief outlook into the larger phenomenon that motivated me to do research on migrants and languages in Japan: *How do L2 users of Japanese perceive and construct competence across their repertoire?* This is the outset of this investigation, situated in a broad interest in the relationship between language and society in Japan. The aim of this

[5] Thurlow (2020) counts such professions as *language workers*, denoting individuals who work with languages as main part of their job—in Jun's case, this includes interpretation and translation.

thesis is to explore some individuals and their experiences with regard to languages in contemporary Japan. How do they make sense of these experiences?

1.2 Outline of this chapter

Making sense of something is called *rationalization*. I understand rationalization as a discursive process, as it relates to language users' interpretations of patterns and communicative behavior that they orient to and address (Silverstein 1979: 195). [6] Rationalizations can serve as acts of *positioning*. Speakers position themselves vis-à-vis their interlocutors, contents of talk, and narrated characters in context (Bamberg 1997; Wortham 2000; Wortham & Reyes 2021). Positioning thus reveals a subject's perspective on the world. Rationalization practices are often interwoven with storytelling, interpretation, and presentation via performance in discourse (Briggs 1988). This discourse is not about reconstructing interactional experiences *as they were*, nor about any claims to a faithful representation of an event. Instead, examining rationalization in discourse is a way to access the interpretative procedures individuals employ in the process of reflecting—about themselves, their surroundings, their being in Japan, and language competence (see Archer 2012 for an investigation into the variation of human *reflexivity*. I present my usage of reflexivity in Sections 3.4.1 and 4.3.4).

At the core of my interest lies an examination of *communicative practices*, i.e., patterned and sedimented ways of using linguistic and other communicative signs in different contexts (Hanks 1996). A practice is always mediated through perceptions and retrospective reflection on instances—specific acts—of communication. This is what I want to consider together, as a set of two inseparable facets of a single phenomenon: situated use and reflection on such use. I present a more sophisticated conceptualization of these phenomena as a relationship between *pragmatics* and *metapragmatics* (Silverstein 1993: 53–55) in the Theory Chapter (Section 3.4). Metapragmatics encompasses the frameworks, interpretations, and practices through which speakers make sense of the pragmatics of communication. The empirical part

[6] Silverstein adopts this expression from Boas (1911: 71) who refers to rationalizations as a *secondary explanation*. Boas contrasts them to *primary phenomena*, a distinction which Silverstein (1979: 195–196) problematizes, due to challenges in differentiating between levels of consciousness that languages users exhibit (see also Silverstein 2001 on this issue), asking which features surface to awareness in order to become addressed in discourse.

will therefore consist of an analysis of how my interlocutors talk about using language and how they make sense of aspects of competence.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will introduce my research questions (Section 1.3). Then, I focus on the contributions of my study (Section 1.4) in which I foreshadow my approach to the topic of this thesis. After that, I will situate my study amidst different strands of research that are broadly interested in the intersections between individuum, language, and society (Section 1.5). I will provide an illustrative framework into which I embed the empirical chapters (Section 1.6), before I present an outline of the structure of this thesis (Section 1.7).

1.3 Research questions

In this thesis, I take on a *subjective* and an *interactional* perspective on exploring lived experiences of language in Japan. On the one hand, I seek to understand the personal experiences and reflections of my interlocutors when using Japanese and other languages while living in Japan. On the other hand, I want to investigate this by examining interaction—be it in private couple talk or interviews. The analysis is informed by a discursive approach that holds that subjective experience and intersubjective interaction are always framed with widely circulating discourses across societies (Busch 2019).

Considering the issues outlined above, my research is guided by the following questions:

1) What perceptions of competence in and across languages do migrants in Japan have?
2) How do Japanese-as-L2-users mobilize aspects of competence across different domains—private, professional, public?
3) How do they reflect on and make sense of experiences and moments in which issues of language competence were at stake?
4) How do metapragmatic practices (i.e., explicit reflections on language use) function as sites where L2 users negotiate identity, belonging, difference, and legitimacy in Japan?

1.4 Contributions of my study

I approach these questions by centering competence in and across languages and connect it with lived experiences. In doing so, I concur with Kataoka et al. (2013) in their proposal to

recenter the notion of competence in linguistic anthropology, which I apply to my investigation. I will later show that we need to understand issues in which competence in language is at stake as a *lived experience* individuals make in Japan. These experiences may be single moments or repeated events that leave imprints and shape subsequent pathways. The main individuals I focus on in the empirical chapters were socialized in Austria or Germany with varieties of German as their L1. In two cases, they are from Italy (Chapter 7). [7] While there is some research on German-as-L1-speakers' acquisition of L2 Japanese (for example, Tomita 2013 on discourse coherence in storytelling), no larger projects have investigated the lived experiences of competence among this group of individuals. This study thus contributes to our understanding of how people belonging to this small but present community in Japan navigate communicative practices.

To capture individuals' understanding of experiences, I apply a variety of methods. In Chapter 4, I will present this variety, including recordings of interactions, different types of interviews, and creative methods, such as language portraits. All these are types of data that underwent rigorous discourse analysis.

One approach to expanding the notion of competence is to highlight the role of *intersubjectivity* (Rydell 2018). In particular, I examine acts by which speakers ascribe intentionality to others and make assumptions about intentionality. These viewpoints have not been explored in previous studies on L2 users of Japanese. Ascribing intentionality to another person is a strategy in discourse, mainly to claim an authoritative position and legitimize one's participation as an L2 speaker of Japanese in society (see the examples in the empirical part, Chapters 0, 0, and 7). Such ascriptions are part of the rationalizing process that underlies L2 users' articulations about their perceived competences. By means of rationalization, speakers explore their alterity positions that can be understood as the "other side" of identity, an exclusive delineation of oneself from the Other. This understanding is always covertly present in linguistic performance. Such alterity constructions prominently surface, for example, in *citational practices*—constructing the voices of others while laminating them with one's own voice (Bakhtin 1986; Goffman 1986). The voice emerges here as a calibrator in a double sense, through its physiological properties that allow modulation to create additional layers of meaning via iconic features, and through its indexical properties

[7] As of June 2025, 8,774 German, 831 Austrian, and 5,864 Italian nationals are registered as residents in Japan (Ministry of Justice 2025).

that allow the speaker to take on a position as competent user, not only of Japanese. I discuss the theoretical foundation for these concepts in Theory Chapter Section 3.3.3 and contextualize the findings in my Discussion Chapter Section 8.3.

Discourse analysis and sequential analysis reveal how patterned *metrical structure* is mapped onto narrated experiences. They provide a framework for investigating the connection between utterances and experiences. In this way, I connect an analysis of *what* my interlocutors say about competence with *how* they say it (see, for example, Ochs & Capps 2002). Discourse or conversation analysis has been applied to Japanese-as-L2-user's comments on language use before. My approach fills a gap by focusing on how *aspects of competence are mobilized* in discourse. This requires a meta-view on competence that I expound in the Theory Chapter (Section 3.5).

Reflecting on aspects related to language use, such as perceived or ascribed competence, is constituted by retrospection and introspection. These are cognitive and discursive processes. One way to access my interlocutors' experiences in Japan would be to witness their interactions. Another way is to attend to the forms they use when talking about their experiences. Such an approach takes speakers' utterances as an analytical object, as they are not materialized vessels of thoughts. Rather, utterances constitute a top layer of meaning-making (Merleau-Ponty 2012 [1945]: 187). This meaning-creating layer portrays a view on language as not only articulated but experienced through the body (Busch 2017) and emitted through utterances. The body in this conception is not seen merely as producer or animator of uttering bits of language but reflexively takes up and incorporates utterances emitted by other speakers. Utterances themselves constitute "*modes of experiencing the world*" (Ochs 2012: 149, emphasis in original). Enactments of verbal performances in discursive interaction evoke and create a narrated world inhabited by personae and their practices (Agha 2007a; Wortham & Reyes 2021). The discourse analysis presented in this thesis therefore aims at balancing focus on content as well as form when investigating perceptions of competence across the repertoire. This fills a gap to previous research that worked with the embodied dimensions of competence (of Japanese, and other languages, see Iwasaki 2018, 2021a, 2021b, 2022), or phenomenological approaches (Hori et al. 2025).

The results show that dominant discourses about Japanese identity—*nihonjinron* (see Chapter 2)—linger on. However, they come to the fore through individuals' narratives who did not grow up surrounded by *nihonjinron* discourses. While also positioning themselves as observer of Japanese cultural practices, L2 users of Japanese seem to embrace and recirculate

ideas about practices that are informed by ideologies of Japanese uniqueness. In this way, newcomers do not only lead to questioning Japan's and Japanese identity, but participate in sustaining discourses of alterity (see Discussion Chapter Section 8.3.1).

1.5 Situating the investigation

To answer my research questions, I draw on a toolkit of methods that span various disciplines that bear interest in the connection between language, people, and society. I situate the project within the field of *interactional sociolinguistics* (Gordon & Tannen 2021; Gumperz 1982; Tannen 2005 [1984]), a field that seeks to explain speakers' choices of linguistic forms across a variety of interactional contexts. It particularly focuses on the ways in which speakers employ communicative resources to contextualize an intended meaning and thus guide interactants' interpretative frameworks for inferring meaning. Gumperz (1999: 458) states that "the aim is to find empirical ways of showing through discourse analysis whether or not interpretive procedures are shared." Interactional sociolinguistics emerged alongside interactional and discursive investigations in *linguistic anthropology*,[8] particularly the *ethnography of communication* (Hymes 1967). This is a practice-centered approach to communication, usually with a focus on communities. The analysis therefore is centrally a *pragmatic* one, examining the effects of—along with speakers' reflections on—speech acts, deictic expressions, and the structure of conversation. This is complemented by broadening the view from single speech acts toward repeated expressions, denotational as well as indexical, to understand the formation of more perduring identification and differentiation practices with and through language (Wortham & Reyes 2021). By applying linguistic theories and method(ologie)s to social context and issues, I also align the project with the field of *applied linguistics*, especially when foregrounding multilingual experiences of language learners (Kramsch 2009).

I am interested in what the Japanese research tradition focusing on the connection of language and society in a broad sense used to call *gengo seikatsu* ('language life'). Researchers with this broad agenda investigated, in simple terms, the role of language use in the everyday life of Japanese individuals (Heinrich 2002, 2019a). As this field first developed independent

[8] For a sketch of divergences and convergences of the field of sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, see Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz (2008).

of US-American or European approaches to language and society, the focus was mainly on Japanese, its dialectal varieties, and registers (Heinrich 2002; Shibamoto 1987: 262–263). Research on language life has been substituted through the term *sociolinguistics* in Japan nowadays (Heinrich 2019a). However, I find the connection between language and life as focal points as fitting to recenter speakers and their experiences throughout various life events. It may also allow to draw some connections to Busch's (2017) concept of *the lived experience of language*, even though they developed entirely independently.[9]

The whole project is designed with principles of *ethnography* and *fieldwork* in mind (Chapter 4.1). Ethnography is the in-depth, systematic study and written representation of people's everyday social life and practices. Fieldwork is the on-the-ground, immersive data collection through observation and interaction that makes such ethnographic understanding possible (see, for example, Blommaert & Dong 2020). I thus moved to Japan and approached and encountered individuals in various contexts (Grosser 2024b). Understanding people's practices is best done by observing and listening to them. For this purpose, I collected recordings of interactions, mainly dinner or lunchtime conversations of binational couples. I conducted different types of interviews with many L2 users of Japanese, spanning over three years. I employed *narrative* and *biographical* methods in interviewing, using language portraits and story prompts (Busch 2016). I also made use of journaling that transformed into *autoethnographic vignettes*, tracing my own pathway through the project and Japan. Using these methods, I arrived at interpretations of how my interlocutors in the field live with language and competence. These individuals are migrants—newcomers and sojourners—who use Japanese and other languages. They go on about everyday life, form (romantic) relationships, go to work, take part in shaping public discourse, and figure out their relations of belonging. These different areas of life will be explored further in the next section.

1.6 Experiences: Between private, professional, and public

In the empirical part, I explore different contexts of lived experiences that L2 users of Japanese enter while living in Japan. I structure these contexts loosely as three *domains* of social life: *private*, *professional*, and *public*. Fishman defined a domain as

[9] I present a very brief genealogy of the concept of the lived experience of language in 3.2.3. See Busch (2017, 2021 [2013]: 19–21) for a detailed elaboration.

> a socio-cultural construct abstracted from topics of communication, relationships between communicators, and locales of communication, in accord with the institutions of a society and the spheres of activity of a culture, in such a way that *individual behavior and social patterns can be distinguished from each other and yet related to each other*. (Fishman 1965: 75, emphasis in original)

A domain is constituted by persons that recognize the forms and the use of signs that form a *register* (Agha 2007a), or other patterned ways of using language, such as *style* (Coupland 2007). I am cautious to distinguish these domains here as three separate *spheres* or full-fledged theoretical concepts, as they rather serve as analytic orientations. I concede with Gal (2005) that all three domains are constituted by communicative practices and *metapragmatic uptake* of discourses (see also Warner 2002: 11–12 and Theory Chapter 3.4). They are constituted by *ideologies* about how communicative practices are carried out in differentiated situations (Gal 2005; McElhinny 1997).

I use the image of a tetrahedron as a visualization of this tripartite division (Figure 1). The three domains—private, professional, and public—form the vertices anchoring the lived experience, much like the foundational points of a crystalline structure that holds firm under tension. Each vertex draws from its ground: the private vertex roots in personal bonds and intimacies; the professional vertex steadies workplace roles and routines; the public vertex

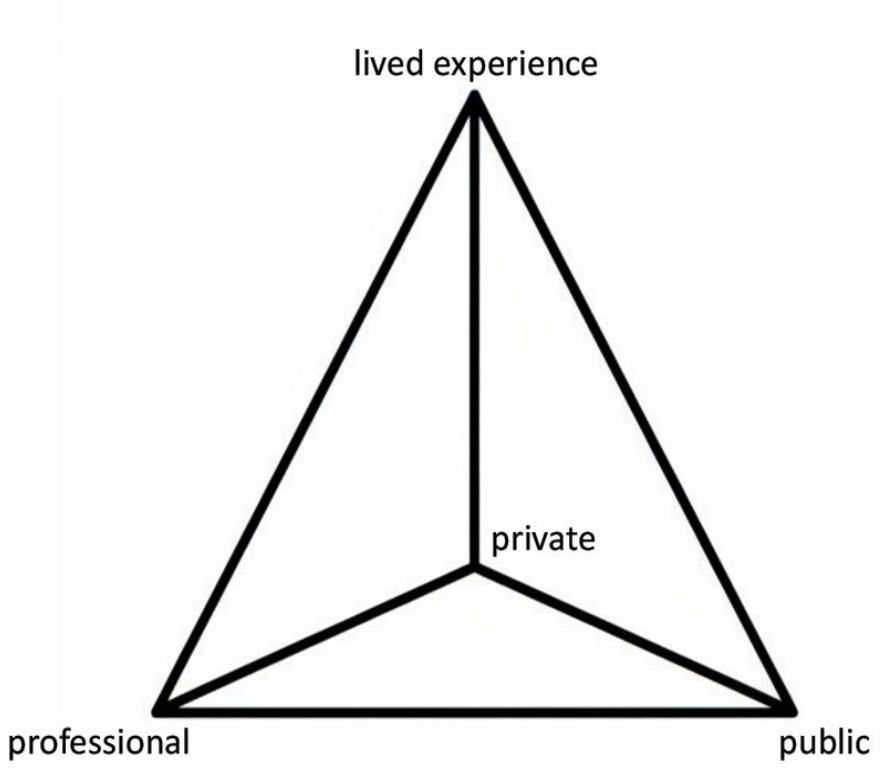


Figure 1. Lived experience as a tetrahedron

binds to wider societal discourses. The lived experience emerges on the top from the planes spanning these three vertices, stretched out in interdependence. Remove any vertex, and the form collapses. Yet it endures flux, redistributing strains across all points as one navigates realms, mirroring my participants' fluid mobilities. The anchor points can shift to new terrains, flexing with life's movements in pathways. This illustrates how lived experiences evolve across contexts.

Such a view on the three different domains is also supported by discourse data from applied linguistics. Piller (2002: 47) explains that conversational data constitute a hybrid genre between public and private. Talk is perceived as rather private in, for example, couple talk or narratives about personal experiences. It is framed as a rather public genre when considering its status as data used in academic publications. What is more, these ostensibly distinct spheres of life are entangled in discourse (Gal 2005). For example, public issues influence private discourse, and vice-versa, as private arguments may be transported into public debate (McElhinny 1997; Tannen 2006; Tovares 2006).[10] Speakers may construe them as distinct settings that require distinct sets of competences from speakers, as Jun hints at in the introductory example (Extract 1.1). However, such distinction itself needs to be approached cautiously, as the *public/private* distinction is a rather modern and Western perspective on differentiations of social areas (see Gal 2005: 24 for a brief review). The three domains thus provide the scaffolding of the empirical chapters, not analytic concepts.

In my project, I sneak into the *private* when looking at interactions of an international couple (Chapter 5). During my fieldwork, I asked couples with one Japanese and one non-Japanese part to record their daily interactions (for example, at home) for me (see Section 4.2.3 in the Methods Chapter for details). The private domain has been regarded as somewhat secret, concealed space. Therefore, it might be challenging to access this space for linguistic enquiry—and this secrecy probably enhances its allure in (interactional) sociolinguistics. My interest in language use of multilingual couples arises from the observation that there is an increasing number of such relational configurations in Japan, but few studies that specifically look at language choices and negotiations (but see Kawahara & Okado 2009; Takeuchi 2023b; Poore 2019; Yamamoto 2001). Language management within a family is exercised through

[10] Arendt (2007 [1981]) cautions against the mutual infiltration of private and publics spheres, for example, through governmental measures. They blur lines between personal necessities individuals need to attend to in private, and politics creating the frame for governing society. For her, a public sphere can only exist with an intact private sphere.

authority of one part of the family (Spolsky 2009: 30). Authority therefore influences language choice. A relationship can be understood as a private domain of human experience where couple discourse is enacted. Language choice is one feature that is embedded within a broader set of negotiations that partners typically have to make when sustaining their relationship. Couplehood is *performed* through language (Gonçalves 2013b; Piller 2002: 265)—and this performance is a hybrid creation of private language practices that are part of an L2 user's repertoire.

Another domain is the *professional* world. L2 users of Japanese conventionally have to enter the working world when settling long-term in Japan (Chapter 6). Working at a Japanese company or institution requires cultivating the ability to interact in professional settings. Hof describes that European professionals in Japan can explore more job opportunities when achieving a high proficiency in Japanese (see the examples in Hof 2022: 106–116). Workplace interactions often require mastering certain registers, in the case of Japanese mainly honorific registers, such as *keigo*. Use of forms in this register is often associated with politeness in interaction with co-workers, clients, and superiors. Extensive research has been conducted on how L1 users employ honorifics at the workplace (e.g., the chapters in Cook & Shibamoto-Smith 2018). However, there is also a growing body of research on experiences and reflections unique to L2 users of Japanese (Iwasaki 2010, 2011; McConachy & Fujino 2022). Moody (2014, 2018, 2019b) presents examples of ethnographic investigations of American interns and their workplace discourse at a Japanese company. Orienting to issues of language competence, for example, a lack of Japanese competence, can be mobilized as self-mockery to redefine boundaries between so-called native and non-native users of Japanese (Moody 2019a).[11] However, mobilization of such ideologies about identities also leads to building a relationship at the workplace.

I locate the third empirical chapter (Chapter 7) in the realm of the *public*. Some researchers in second language education in Japan have moved to view competence in Japanese as means to partake in public discourses (Ushikubo et al. 2024). Migrants' Japanese competence, in turn, is also object of public discourses. For a long time, there has been a pronounced gap in policy and resources—no national scheme, limited support structures, lack of specialized teacher training, and reliance on volunteers (for an overview, see Gottlieb

[11] See Pizziconi & Iwasaki (2024) for a study on how L2 users of Japanese negotiate stances of sameness and difference in intercultural contexts.

2011b: 33–63). I summarize some of the current issues in Chapter 2. In language policy, lack of official support for minority and immigrant languages is repeatedly linked with issues of linguistic competence, proficiency, and literacy at the societal level. The reason for this is that "[m]ultilingualism and multiculturalism remain mainly aesthetic and ludic in Japan" (Heinrich 2025b: 698). A tension that arises from a lack of linguistic validation of an L2 user's efforts to master Japanese may manifest in interaction, as I will show in this chapter. Public discourse, therefore, transpires into interpersonal interactions.

1.7 Outline of the thesis

This introduction serves as a broad overview of the issues and questions that guide me through the research process. In Chapter 2, I give an overview of discursive approaches to L2 Japanese users. I contextualize the background within a wider frame of language and migration policies in contemporary Japan. Then, I proceed to review studies on interactions of L2 users with so-called native speakers of Japanese. This literature is the groundwork onto which I build my study.

In Chapter 3, I develop the theories and concepts in detail. I propose the idea of a *reflexive loop* as a connector that ties four central theoretical concepts together. I move from *experience* as a fundamental human capacity for making sense of language to an interaction-centered concept: *stance*. This establishes an interactional perspective for understanding the concept of *metapragmatics* as a reflexive but inherently social articulation of engagement with linguistic experience. These three concepts flow together in my (re)formulation of *competence* as an embodied, intersubjective, reflexive, and ultimately ideological notion.

In Chapter 4, I present the methods that I employed to answer my research questions, as well as methodological reflections. I start with a presentation of my fieldwork and its implications for the research process, before I outline the different methods I used. In the second part of this chapter, I present the analytical tools and procedures.

The subsequent three chapters form the empirical part of this thesis. In Chapter 5, I zoom in on the private realm in negotiations of language choice of an international (Austrian-Japanese) multilingual couple. In their interactions, the issues of expressibility, understanding, and willingness to understand the other emerge. Their discussion about use and refusal of Japanese and English are an example that competence in and across languages go beyond

knowledge of language as a system, and that they are entrenched intersubjective negotiation and emotions.

Chapter 6 presents a case study of a German professional who works at a company in Tokyo. She reflects on different communicative practices in request sequences at her workplace, comparing different strategies in English and Japanese discourse. In her narrative, she encodes parallelism, rhythm, and comparison as embodied indexical icons that function as tactics to exhibit her frustration with time-consuming formulaic routines in professional discourse at the Japanese company. The professional world is another area of lived experiences of communicative competence.

In Chapter 7, I draw on a range of examples from different sources that center on the metadiscourse on complimenting sequences (*nihongo ojoozu desu ne*, 'your Japanese is good'). I show that L2 users of Japanese do not regard these compliments as sincere or authentic appraisal of their competence in Japanese, but rather as a stereotypical interactional routine. In this way, they position themselves as excluded and different from Japanese individuals. At the same time, reflexivity toward this discourse is a way to construct an identity—through alterity—as an international, multilingual individual in Japan that encounters alterity stances as ordinary experiences. The metadiscourse about this sequence is an imprint of discourses that legitimize and delegitimize linguistic practices of Japanese speakers.

Chapter 8 discusses the findings from the empirical chapters in light of the theoretical and methodological outline. I revisit competence as mooring for ideological work and relate it to performance that encompasses the resources for stancetaking. Going back to the Chomskyan distinction between *competence* and *performance* is a move to show how they actually co-constitute each other, they form the two sides of the same coin. I then contextualize the findings as illustrative examples of how individuals negotiate their multilingual lives in contemporary Japan.

I conclude with final reflections in which I revisit my research questions and wrap up the thesis (Chapter 9).

2 Discursive Perspectives on Japanese Competence

2.1 Overview of this chapter

In this chapter, I situate this study within social and interactional contexts that L2 users of Japanese enter or repeatedly find themselves in. I first review some studies on migration and identity in Japan (Section 2.2) and provide an overview on the role of Japanese in the multilingual ecology of Japan (Section 2.3). I touch a bit on ideologies about language that have been investigated in the Japanese context (Section 2.4). I explore the idea of being an L2 user of Japanese as a distinct form of identification (Section 2.5). Then, I move from the individual, subjective perspective to the intersubjective perspective: interaction. I review the literature on language use in 'contact situations' (*sesshoku bamen*) that evolved in the Japanese research context (Section 2.6). I then expand the view to studies on interactions between L1 and L2 users of Japanese that are situated in other research traditions in sociolinguistics or applied linguistics of Japanese (Section 2.7).

2.2 Migration and identity in Japan

To understand an individual's experience and deliberations about competence in and across languages, we need attend to the global context in which such experience can come about—mobility and migration (Urry 2007). In recent years, Japan receives a continuous influx of international workers and students. However, there is a continuous political debate on the acceptance and scale of migration to Japan. Liu-Farrer (2020) describes that Japan is now slowly transitioning from an ethno-nationalist society toward an immigrant society. While migration to Japan is possible within institutional frameworks, migrants only make up around 3% of the total population in 2024 (Immigration Services Agency of Japan 2025). Despite its cultural attractiveness and growing popularity as a tourist destination, migrants encounter many obstacles when trying to settle for the long-term. Researchers list Japanese company culture as one of the reasons. Japanese companies struggle to embrace an

international workforce due to their tendency to "remain wedded to ethnocentric employment practices and workplace relations" (Hof & Tseng 2020: 527). Companies may therefore prefer individuals socialized in the Japanese social and education system. While discourses of appreciating multiculturalism are gaining traction in recent years, they exhibit only superficial efforts to include diverse practices and hesitant attitudes toward structural change. The Japanese government often regards migrants as a resource to internationalize companies and academic institutions, yet offers few prospects for long-term residence and institutional structures to support them (see, Otomo 2019 for an overview).

Here, we have to consider migrants' diverse motivations for moving. The individuals whose stories I share in this thesis show cultural enthusiasm for Japan and seek a stimulating and convenient lifestyle, while also seeing Japan as a country offering new career opportunities. This aligns with the types of migration motivations Hof (2022) explores in her ethnography. Hof shows that migration is often motivated by a perceived lack of prospects at home, the promise and excitement of life abroad, and the aspiration to attain or maintain middle-class status in a context seen as promising for personal and professional development (Hof 2022: 23–50).

One group of mobile individuals that has received attention in academia is international and exchange students at Japanese institutions of higher education. Debnár (2020) discusses the different roles that exchange students occupy in Japan. Exchange students often take on economic roles, for example, working part-time in the service sector or as language teachers. While my study does not explicitly focus on exchange students, I can relate such experiences to those of the individuals I encountered in my fieldwork. Being ascribed the status as an outsider, newcomers report that their interactions with Japanese individuals are fleeting and that is sometimes hard to create and maintain bonds with them (for examples see Ikeguchi 2012 and Rees 2024). Such attitudes may contribute to a perduring distance between newly settling individuals and autochthonous Japanese citizen. At the same time, social relations and connections, for example, to the local community, are essential for sojourners' decisions to stay in Japan when facing hardships (Matsumoto 2015a).[12]

Perceptions of race (as phenomenological and discursive categorizations) may also come into play here. While being perceived as white in Japan certainly provides privileges, it also

[12] The relevance of networks is also shown by Kurata (2004), who analyzes L2 users' maintenance of networks outside Japan, such as Australia, where they continue to use Japanese.

entails marginalization and conditional inclusion. Debnár (2025) shows that being white in Japan is associated with being a "good migrant." These migrants are often seen as skilled, unproblematic, and desired individuals (Debnár 2025: 101–103). They also often receive praise from Japanese for contributing to a global image in institutions of higher education (see also Debnár 2020). These "good" white migrants—for example, those of European descent—stand in contrast to migrants with other backgrounds, such as individuals from Asia who might experience different treatment in Japanese society based on outer appearance (Liu-Farrer 2020: 146–149). The concept of *good migrants* helps reconcile the paradoxes of whiteness, highlighting how it positively differentiates white migrants from other groups while still imposing limits on their integration and inclusion. Such friction features on several discursive scales. I will examine some cases in which these tensions become visible in narratives in Chapter 7.

Researchers have been tracing transformations and changes in the sociolinguistic ecology of Japan since decades (e.g., Heinrich & Galan 2011). Such tracings are leaning toward sociological purviews, which is why I propose to re-center the individual, *the speaking subject* (Theory Chapter Section 3.2.2) when looking at the nexus of language and mobility in Japan. Mobility also increasingly receives attention in Japanese sociolinguistics (see the volumes by Kawakami et al. 2018, 2022; Miyake & Arai 2021). Physical and social movement comes to be seen as a quotidian phenomenon in a demographically changing Japan. Language and mobility take on a central part in discourses about migration, as they carry along talk about mobile people and their practices. To capture the dynamics within these discourses, Lo & Park (2017) propose a *metapragmatics of mobility* with two dimensions. First, as a collection of ideas about mobile people and their characteristics, for example, transnationality (De Fina & Perrino 2013). These may also include ideas about 'foreigners' (*gaikokujin* or *gaijin* in Japanese), their practices, and experiences. Second, this concept considers mobility as movement of discourse through spatiotemporal spheres. Individuals take their experiences gained in prior contexts and apply them to new contexts (Yagi 2018). Thereby they transport discourses through space and time. These two sides of the same coin of mobility and will be kept in mind throughout this thesis.

Dominant discourses about identities in Japan are infused with emic or *ethno-metapragmatic* concepts (Silverstein 1992: 60). These are ideas about the constituents and qualities of something like a "Japanese character." Portrayals of Japanese identity flow through public discourses and may thus seep into private interactions. One example of such

discourses is the *uchi/soto* ('inside/outside') distinction, proposed by Doi (1986). It is one concept amongst a bundle that models psychological relations between individuals in Japan, serving as explanatory frameworks of how people behave within their social group (*uchi*), and to those who do not belong to them, being outside (*soto*) (Bachnik & Quinn 1994). The inside/outside distinction is a *scalar* one. It is used to make a difference between "Japanese" (*uchi*) and "foreigners" (*soto*), as well as within groups of Japanese and, for example, within the private space of the family home and the outside world (Kuwayama 2009: 49). It is also made analytically fruitful for explaining patterned usage of linguistic variation. For instance, the *uchi/soto* distinction has been applied to explain how speakers of Japanese employ different styles and registers depending on social relation (Ball 2004; Okamoto 1997; Wetzel 1994).

Shame is another concept that allegedly influences Japanese socialization practices. It speaks to affective or emotional perceptions of what kind of behavior is normatively deemed appropriate in a given context (Takada 2019). Interactional moments in which communicative practices are experienced as not aligning with a norm may be evaluated as *hazukashii* ('awkward/embarrassing'). I will show an example in Chapter 5.

The *uchi/soto* concept and ideas about *shame* are part of an ideology that originates within the broader domain of nationalist discourses about Japanese identity: *nihonjinron* 'discourses about the Japanese' (Befu 2001; Burgess 2007). These discourses prominently shaped conceptions of Japanese identity, permeating various scales of social life and relationships, with the aim of portraying a homogenized ideal of Japanese uniqueness to the public.

While the insider/outsider distinction is upheld and made relevant in interaction, there are also subsuming forces that expect, for example, foreigner-outsiders to behave in the same way as insider-Japanese. I will explore the creation of differences in Sections 2.6 and 2.7 of this chapter. First, I delve into the relevance of *language* in contexts of contact and mobility in Japan.

2.3 Japanese language and multilingualism

Being able to understand, speak, and write Japanese facilitates connection and embedding in Japanese society. Hashimoto (2018) explains that the Japanese government increasingly sees language education as a vehicle for foreigners to become part of the workforce and society. This reverberates *discourses of integration* (Flubacher & Yeung 2016) that pose language competence and assessment as necessary paths for migrants to participate in the host society.

However, the promotion of Japanese is often framed in utilitarian terms, viewing learners as human resources rather than individuals with diverse motivations and linguistic needs. For example, multilingual education for migrants is still lacking (see, for example, Fujita-Round 2019). Researchers have proposed that policymakers in Japan should enhance accommodation to such needs (Chapple 2014: 356). In recent years, especially in large metropoles such as Tokyo, nascent multilingual diversity can be observed. This transformation leads to shifts in individuals' daily encounters of languages and communicative practices (Heinrich & Yamashita 2018; Maher 2022). As a consequence, Shoji (2019) suggests that the increasing numbers of individuals with broader multilingual repertoires may organically lead to a higher acceptance of multilingualism in Japanese society.[13] Here, we can see that multilingualism in Japan has traditionally been framed as an obstacle to smooth communication among residents. A particular obstacle is migrants' allegedly lacking Japanese skills (Otomo 2019: 102). The proposed solutions to ensure communication among residents take on two forms. First, Japanese language education for incoming residents, and second, English language education for Japanese speakers. English in Japan is imagined as the lingua franca that facilitates communication with people from all over the world (Iino 2010: 67; Seargeant 2009). Both policy approaches, however, often tend to reinforce distinctions between Japanese native speakers and learners of Japanese. This distinction is a fractal recursion of differentiations based on race or nationality, between Japanese nationals and foreigners.[14] At the same time, inclusion of other linguistic resources is ignored. I will later explain that a *repertoire approach* (Busch 2021 [2013]) that I expound in Theory Chapter Section 3.5.2 can overcome a narrowed view focusing on single languages that need to be fostered in some way to gain access to and create private, professional, and public lives.

A more recent paradigm in Japanese language education, policy, and sociolinguistics is emerging, cultivating 'coexistence' (*kyōsei* or *kyōzon*) with the growing multilingual population (Murata 2022a). In this frame, researchers engage with the current challenges of a linguistically diversifying Japan—notwithstanding the fact that Japan has for a long time been a linguistically diverse archipelago (Maher & Yashiro 1995). *Living together* indicates that there has been in shift in which communities of Japanese users are perceived in society,

[13] Of course, it remains to be seen if such a shift in attitudes will develop over the course of the next years.

[14] On *fractal recursion* as a concept in research on language ideologies (Gal & Irvine 1995; Irvine & Gal 2000). See also my summary in 3.4.4.

and particularly, in academia that contributes to formulating concepts to describe these shifts. *Kyōsei* emphasizes the contemporary reality in Japan, where Japanese people live side-by-side with non-Japanese.[15] The mere existence of this concept may indicate that such coexistence is something marked or new, something in need of consideration and academic investigation. Political discourses and policies, however, rather focus on adapting foreigners into the Japanese mainstream and thus drive assimilation instead or recognizing and appreciating cultural diversity (Shiobara 2020). The experiences of the individuals I introduce in this thesis thus stand as illustrating examples of the connection between conviviality and multilingualism in contemporary Japan.

While some researchers and educators have called for more complex treatments of L2 users and their communicative competence in Japanese (e.g., Ōhashi & Ōhashi 2015), idealization of the native Japanese speaker is still prevalent, particularly in Japanese language education (Mori et al. 2021: 101). This stands in contrast to the multilingual reality in which L2 users' Japanese is embedded. For example, Ikeda & Bysouth (2013) and Otsuji (2015) present cases in which L2 users of Japanese draw on a variety of multilingual resources in their daily interactions in Japan. They highlight the relevance of *choice* where speakers make deliberate decisions about specific resources in communicative contexts. Before I explore these aspects of choices and self-understanding as an L2 user of Japanese, I give a brief overview of issues pertaining to ideologies in the Japanese context.

2.4 Ideologies in the Japanese context

Japan has been a fruitful ground for investigating the mutual influence between ideologies and language. In the early stages, investigations have focused on ideas about language within the Japanese context, such as creating a standard language through influence of Western nationalist movements that called for a unified language. *Standard Japanese* was seen as a vehicle for modernization (Clark 2009; Heinrich 2012; Koyama 2011; Lee 2012 [1996]; Tanaka 1981; Yasuda 1999). The field of investigation of language-ideological effects and debates in and about Japan focuses on dialects (Ball 2004; Koyama 2001), gender (Inoue 2006;

[15] See also the critical examination of the *kyōsei* concept by Ueda & Yamashita (2006). The chapters in their edited volume show that coexistence itself is often construed as another guise for forces of adaptation. For example, adapting to foreigners to avoid causing troubles with Japanese nationals.

Okamoto & Shibamoto Smith 2004), honorifics or politeness (Koyama 2004; Yamashita 2001; Wetzel 2004), and later the treatment of autochthonous languages (Heinrich 2012), and script (Robertson 2021). Okamoto & Shibamoto-Smith (2016) show that ideologies and actual practices with respect to variation are diverse. Also ideologies concerning other languages are now increasingly examined, with questions of the status of English in the linguistic environment of Japan being at the forefront (Bouchard 2017; Seargeant 2009). These studies converge in their focus on how ideologies highlight normative constructions of varieties while obscuring or erasing alternative practices from institutionalized language policies. In essence, these studies show how differences among speaking subjects and practices are created and contested (Santalahti et al. 2025).

Recent studies expand research on ideologies from language to other modes of communication, including spaces of encounter and digital spheres (see the overviews in Grosser et al. 2025 and Miyazaki 2023). This expansion aligns with the truism that language ideologies are about much more than language. There is also a surge of interested into how L2 users of Japanese are treated in society (see the following Sections, especially 2.6 and 2.7). Before that, I review studies that focus on the identities of L2 users of Japanese.

2.5 Users of Japanese

Competence and experience are conventionally tied to individuals, which calls for a *speaker-centered approach* (Flubacher & Purkarthofer 2022, see also Theory Chapter Section 3.2.2). In shifting toward individuals, I move from a broader societal overview of multilingualism and stances toward it, toward languages and forms of communication as they reside within and across individuals. Kramsch (2009) holds that all language learners are *multilingual subjects*, not simply speakers of multiple codes but individuals whose identities are shaped by their encounters with different linguistic and cultural worlds.[16] She argues that listening to what language learners say about their experiences is essential to understand multilingualism, because it reveals the subjective and phenomenological dimensions of language learning that are often overlooked in traditional applied linguistics research.

[16] I am aware that I conflate *individual*, *speakers*, and *subjects* here. I will disentangle this terminology in Theory Chapter Section 3.2.2. For now, it may suffice to keep in mind that by speakers, I mean individuals who *use* (not only speak) Japanese. A (speaking) *subject* is an outcome of discursive processes, that of *subjectivation*.

In the context of Japan and Japanese, some studies already point in the direction of investigating lived experiences. For example, Siegal (1996) explored Western female learners of Japanese and how they navigate women's language and politeness. She describes competence in Japanese as an integration of an individual's identity, their position in a sociocultural context, and their language learning. The women reflexively engage with their understanding of cultural etiquette and personal preference in their choice of forms that index woman's language or politeness.

Armour (2001) proposes the concept of *identity slippage*, when Japanese-as-L2 users adopt a persona that is typically associated with "native speakers" and thereby express potential to transgress boundaries of speakerhood. In his later essay, he proposes a reconceptualization of identity slippage where he describes how adult learners experience qualitative shifts in selfhood when switching from their L1 to Japanese (Armour 2009). He shows on the basis of teaching materials that L2 speakers of Japanese are required to adopt prescribed linguistic registers, politeness strategies, and cultural protocols that may conflict with their established L1 identities.

Nomura (2025: 57) shows that when participating in Japanese-speaking communities, L2 users of Japanese in Hong Kong "manage their distance from imagined Japanese-speaking communities to keep their affective motivations or symbolic investments alive." Space and movement intersect with perceptions of Japanese and perceptions of belonging. This work also shows that identity as L2 user of Japanese may be formed without extensive on-site participation in Japanese communities in Japan. Contrary to nationalist ideologies that interweave territories with language, users can form affiliation with a language irrespective of where a language is dominantly used (see Rampton 1990: 99 on *language affiliation*).

Using autoethnography to trace her identity development as a speaker of Japanese, Simon-Maeda (2011) describes feelings of language insecurity and recollects several experiences in which her Japanese was evaluated by others throughout her lifetime. Drawing on poststructuralist theories of language and identity, she challenges traditional cognitive approaches to second language acquisition by positioning language learning as a socially situated, embodied, and continuously emergent process rather than the mastery of a fixed linguistic system. Her account of several decades of living in Japan illustrates the manifold instances in which her competence as an L2 user of Japanese poses an issue, often ascribed through her Japanese interlocutors. Evaluations include ambiguous appreciation, like when she was told by another teacher that 95% of her Japanese would be correct (Simon-Maeda

2011: 101). At other times, they are belittling, like when she was told by students that her writing looks cute (2011: 107–108). Simon-Maeda's story highlights the relevance of a holistic approach toward understanding a speaker. She shows how her Japanese grows over several domains, in the private space of her family and the professional realm of her workplace. Her autoethnographic approach also emphasizes that language learning and identification with a language develop over time and through reflexive engagement with the very process in which learning occurs.

While perceptions of distinct features, such as gendered language or honorifics, have been investigated in Japanese-as-L2 language learning, integrated perspectives on multilingual repertoires in which resources are assembled together have received less attention. Iwasaki (2018, 2021a, 2021b, 2022) collected several language portraits (Methods Chapter 4.2.4) of learners of Japanese sojourning between the UK and Japan. She traces how Japanese learners' pathways of mobility influence their perceptions of their linguistic repertoire. In particular, the sojourners juxtapose and compare Japanese and English, along other languages they can use (Iwasaki 2021b). She highlights individuals' *emotions* toward their languages in how these emotions emerge from a relation between other resources in a repertoire.

In these studies, we see that language use and perceived competence affect the sense of *belonging*. This feeling of attachment expands over several domains of social life, as formulated by Liu-Farrer:

> Language seems to be the most critical condition immigrants talked about when they were asked about their sense of belonging, regardless of their occupation. Sense of belonging has to do with the sense of ease one has with using the language in different situations, such as the friendship circles and company meetings. (Liu-Farrer 2020: 142)

It seems plausible that people feel connected in situations where they are comfortable using a certain language with others. The connection between competence and belonging, however, is even more complicated. The development of language competence does not automatically correspond to a heightened feeling of belonging. For example, Hof's (2022) treatment of language and belonging in Japan reveals a complex relationship: while competence in Japanese is essential for staying in Japan, especially for work and intimate relationships, it does not necessarily translate into belonging or acceptance as members of Japanese society. Instead, a high competence in Japanese can paradoxically reinforce awareness of one's permanent outsider status (see Chapter 7 for some examples that point to this tendency). For

some individuals in Hof's ethnography, Japanese language proficiency was initially framed as enabling belonging, but over time, the time-consuming investment in maintaining Japanese-language friendships led migrants to prioritize English-language relationships (see Hof 2022: 155–165).

The Japanese L2 self is, as becomes evident when adopting a repertoire approach, an embedded part of a *multilingual* self. This self transgresses boundaries of languages in acts of identity display (Otsuji 2015). Such performance calls for a more holistic approach to speakers and their repertoire. I will lay out the theoretical foundation for these concepts, before I show empirical examples of such an approach in this thesis. Before that, I expand my view from speaking subjects and their perceptions of competences toward interaction in this introduction. In the Japanese research tradition, interactions of L1 and L2 users of Japanese have been described as *sesshoku bamen* ('contact situation').

2.6 Language use in contact situations

The *sesshoku bamen* concept was pioneered by Neustupný (for example, Neustupný 1982). It refers to conversational situations involving so-called native and non-native speakers of Japanese. This concept has gained some traction in Japanese sociolinguistics and second language acquisition research, particularly in studies examining how communication unfolds when linguistic and cultural differences meet. Researchers of Japanese *contact situations* make a fundamental distinction between contact situations and *bogo bamen* ('native language situation'), where only native speakers interact.[17] Neustupný argued that these two types of situations differ essentially in their communication patterns (Neustupný 1982, 2005). One defining characteristic are settings in which "speakers of unbalanced language ability" (Fan 2020: 49) interact. Researchers have further refined this typology, identifying subtypes of contact situations based on which languages serve as means to communicate in these situations. The studies of contact situation research have discovered various discursive strategies that are employed in native/non-native interactions. The investigation of such patterns is one of the main tasks in *sesshoku bamen* research, including strategies of evaluating,

[17] Issues with rather static views on the concept of *native speaker* and *non-native speaker* will be discussed in 3.5.3. See the volume edited by Doerr (2009b) for a critical evaluation of native speaker ideologies and their effects.

adjusting, correcting, and more encompassing managing of language and norms in interaction (Fan 1994). *Language management* has become the theoretical and methodological vantage point in this field (see, e.g., Fan 1994; Kimura & Fairbrother 2020), also converging with similar approaches in the field of language policy and planning that focuses on (inter-)personal and national efforts to manage languages choices in some way (Spolsky 2009).

According to Neustupný (1982: 18) breaching of norms leads to either noticing or ignoring, and, if noticed, to different forms of evaluation by "native speakers" of Japanese. Neustupný (2005) further identifies three types of norms emerging in contact situations between L1 and L2 users of Japanese: contact norms that arise of the specific "intercultural" encounter, shared norms (shared by Japanese-as-L1 users), and universal norms. He presents a sequential model of the language management process in interaction. He outlines *deviations from norms* that are *noticed* by speakers, then *evaluated*, before interactants plan *adjustment* and eventually carry out *implementation* of adjustments (Neustupný 2005: 310–311).

Fairbrother (2015a, 2015b) investigates language management of L2 Japanese speakers in multilingual workplaces. She focuses on various adjustment strategies, such as resistance, avoidance, and capitulation, to negotiate relations that are inherently imbued with power, due to hierarchical organization of relations at the workplace (Fairbrother 2015b).

The processual model of language management resembles the analytic approach in more recent and internationally much more widely received studies on *stancetaking* (Englebretson 2007; Jaffe 2009b, see Section 3.3 in the Theory Chapter). The language management approach is often criticized for failing to analyze situated interaction in a discourse-analytic or conversation-analytic way, as it focuses on unrecorded observation or L2 users' reports of interactional experiences. Therefore, it misses, for example, cues that speakers employ to guide the inferential process of their interlocutors in narratives of their experiences, such as interviews. However, aligning with common procedures in interactional sociolinguistics, language management studies do make use of follow-up or playback interviews, where interactants are asked to explain and rationalize their linguistic behavior in retrospect (Neustupný 1990; see also 4.2.4 in the Methods Chapter). I will introduce the relevant expressions to make sense of narratives of metapragmatic experiences in Section 4.3 of the Methods Chapter.

An issue with—at least the classical approach in language management in contact studies—is the assumption that differences between "native" and "non-native" speakers are inherently pre-given and almost inevitably yield to communicative trouble. Early

interactional sociolinguistics perhaps departed from similar observations of fundamental communicative transformations brought about by incoming individuals who use the host language as an L2 in their repertoire, particularly in Western urban environments (Gumperz 1982: 4).[18] While sociocultural differences in use and inference of contextualization conventions sometimes do require more sequences of discursive negotiations, given the vastness of variety within and across users of Japanese (for an overview, see Länsisalmi 2019), we have to consider the properties of *indexical entailment* emerging form contact and encounter between these speakers of Japanese, rather than focusing entirely on *indexical presupposition*, the assumptions that are brought into interaction (Silverstein 1976). For this purpose, I resort to a conceptually more nuanced apparatus of analyzing discursive interaction to overcome some limitations that are associated with the traditional language management approach.[19] Rather than assuming relations of difference a priori, I turn to the sites in which such relations are actively performed and enacted (Doerr 2009a; Hastings & Manning 2004) and therefore newly created—or indexically entailed, to stick with Silverstein's terminology.

In more recent anthropological and sociolinguistic frameworks, *sesshoku bamen* can be understood as a concept that emerged in a specific academic view on the issue in question. Its development in the context of Japan might also point to the fact that few L2 users of Japanese were living in Japan in the 1980s when it was developed. The emergence of this concept therefore indexes the ideology of markedness, salience, or uncommonality that researchers in this field (many of them might share exactly such experiences of being an L2 user in Japan) perceived with respect to encounters where diverging norms become visible and the focus of attention.

Contact between individuals with different cultural backgrounds has been investigated in the early days of interactional sociolinguistics as *interethnic discourse* (Gumperz 1983) and in broader application in *intercultural communication* (Kiesling & Paulston 2005). In order to overcome misunderstandings that allegedly happen in such encounters, researchers proposed to investigate speakers' attention and awareness toward language. While also interested in how differences among people and their practices are made, *culture* in critical

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[18] See Heller & McElhinny's (2017: 217–219) critique that outlines how anti-racist scholars from the 1980s proposed systemic changes as necessary to overcome inequalities, rather than educational interventions, as has originally been suggested by Gumperz.

[19] See also Heinrich (2019b) for a critical review on language management research.

approaches to intercultural communication is treated not as pre-given reservoir of practices that serve as analytical variables. Rather, it is treated as a *discursive* phenomenon, a frame that speakers employ and re-create in interaction (Bucholtz & Hall 2004, 2005; Scollon & Scollon 2001; Spitzmüller 2017). The motivation behind a shift to discourse is to show how differences are enacted in interaction. Differences include, for example, race or ethnicity, nationality and citizenship, and other forms of affiliation, identification, and identity display (Piller 2017: 1–12). To develop a capability to interact across different cultural contexts, researchers propose to foster L2 speakers' *metapragmatic awareness* (Verschueren 2004), a "heightened awareness of the culturally contexted nature of pragmatic acts within and across cultures" (McConachy & Liddicoat 2016: 17). The exact mechanism by which these speakers articulate such awareness, however, remain less understood, in contrast to the pedagogical suggestions made in language education research (McConachy & Liddicoat 2022). In the next section, I will further look at this "culturally contexted nature" in contact situations by reviewing studies that have dealt with interactions of L1 and L2 users of Japanese.

2.7 Interactions of L1 and L2 users of Japanese

Studies that investigate L2 competence in interaction within a conversation analytic framework, have focused on practices of identity categorization. Different epistemic access to forms and expressions in Japanese may lead to interactional metapragmatic negotiation (Kasper & Burch 2016). Speakers may activate categorizations of being a "native" or a "non-native" speaker of Japanese. Such overt articulations show that sociocultural and ethnic background seep into everyday interactions.

For example, Ootsu (2016) shows that L1 users of Japanese confirm their L2 friends' understanding of certain Japanese expressions with explicit metapragmatic framing in small talk, such as "do you understand?" While this is one strategy to prevent misunderstanding and secure the flow of the conversation, it categorizes the participants of the talk into "teaching and learning parties" (Ootsu 2016: 169, my translation). This categorization may lead not only to interactional asymmetries, but more perduring positionings and subjectivation based on Japanese competence. By questioning understanding, speakers are made into L2 speakers or learners of Japanese.

Zimmerman (2007) connects to the idea that identity is a joint accomplishment achieved moment-by-moment through talk. Identity is not fixed but multidimensional and

continuously evolving through sequential organization of conversation. In her study, participants enact personae to create an identity or explicitly refer to labels of identity. Interculturality becomes a resource to manage identities in ongoing interaction. By explicitly addressing *macro-level identities*—Japanese or American, for example—L2 speakers balance feelings of inclusion and exclusion. Professionals at international workplaces in Japan also draw on interculturality to share information and create alignment with co-workers, as Moody (2019a) has shown.

Such macro-level identities are also addressed by Yamaguchi (2018), who examines how talk about language in interactions of Australian and Japanese individuals serves as a strategy to overcome interactional breakdown. He reveals how ideological distinctions between "Japanese" and "Australians" surface in gossip and frames this issue within broader contexts of multicultural ideologies in Australian society that seep into interactants' behavior.

Speakers may activate the personae tied to cultural discourses in interaction, as has been shown by Nishizaka. He analyzed how "cultural difference is accomplished, as relevant to and in the interaction, through its participants putting themselves in a relationship normatively expected to obtain between incumbents of the categories 'Japanese' and 'foreigner,' using this category pair in that interaction" (Nishizaka 1995: 307). In sum, speakers position themselves in alignment with personae indexing categorical identities. A dichotomy between Japanese and non-Japanese incumbents appears to be salient in the Japanese context. In interaction, a foreigner's "exotic" status as another user of Japanese is made relevant through ascription of *strangeness*, for example. Nishizaka (1999) describes such interactive sequences as accomplishments that yield, in essence, difference between speakers and associated personae. These personae are activated in ongoing interaction while at the same time being resources individuals draw on in interaction.

Burch (2017), employing conversation analysis, demonstrated that L2 speakers frequently utilize negative self-assessments or self-deprecation in the presence of L1 speakers. Such modesty is expected in Japanese classrooms and society (Heinrich 2005; Länsisalmi 2025; Matsumoto & Okamoto 2003). It is itself a marker of what is often called *interactional competence*, the degree to which an L2 speaker successfully accomplishes interactional goals (see 3.5.1 for a further discussion).

A body of research has also empirically explored how L1 and L2 users of Japanese converse about language use and competence in everyday settings. Iino (1996, 2006) ethnographically investigated homestay settings, in which competence and norms of

Japanese language use were explicitly addressed. He found that such practices lead to stabilizing an L2 user's identity as foreigner in Japanese society. In a similar vein, Fukuda (2014) analyzed conversations in which L1 Japanese speakers commented on the use of regional dialects or slang by L2 speakers. L1 users often deemed non-standard varieties, particularly those not associated with the speaker's background (e.g., Kansai dialect), as inappropriate in the repertoire of L2 speakers, verbally positioning L2 users as less legitimate members of the language community.[20]

Takeuchi (2020b) recounted an autoethnographic encounter where her use of Japanese dialect was questioned by her Japanese in-laws. She herself is an L1 speaker of English. This account highlights how notions of language ownership, legitimacy, and competence are tightly linked with native speaker ideologies. Takeuchi also conducted interviews with L2 users and discovered that exchanges concerning language competence are routine for L2 speakers and can have negative effects, such as derailing conversations or undermining confidence (Takeuchi 2023b).

Takeuchi (2020a) further examined the impact of *native speaker bias* in Japan, showing how L1 users of Japanese routinely position L2 users' speech as open to judgment, while they claim the prerogative to evaluate linguistic appropriateness. Takeuchi (2023b) expanded on how these biases perpetuate the presumption that only Japanese nationals can achieve "authentic" competence in Japanese. Competence is therefore used to delineate an essentializing core of Japanese identity, as I explained in Section 2.1.

In Grosser (2021), I traced how discourse about competence is framed in mediatized formats, such as short videos for learners of Japanese. In this format, competence of learners of Japanese is continuously framed as insufficient, particularly when it comes to using honorifics and politeness strategies in workplace interactions. While acquisition of honorifics is deemed necessary as part of socialization in professional contexts, this program continuously presents learners as individuals in need of linguistic correction. Japanese "native speakers" are positioned as legitimate evaluators of L2 Japanese speech.

We can also approach communicative competence from how participants perceive their potential and limitation when using Japanese in interaction. I present some cases in Grosser

[20] Studies focusing on short-term language exchanges in study abroad settings, such as Levine (2009) and McGregor (2016), found that explicit metapragmatic activity, i.e., discussions about language norms and usage, is prevalent. Study abroad settings therefore serve as sites where users actively negotiate and contest ideologies of correctness and belonging.

(2023b), proposing *stance* and *explicit metapragmatic discourse* as central concepts through which we can grasp negotiations of L2 competence in Japanese interaction (see Theory Chapter Sections 3.3 and 3.4 in which I elaborate these concepts). I showed that speakers direct their attention to issues of competence in different arenas, such as ordinary enactments of speaking, translations, and workplace discourse. Competence in Japanese emerges as an embodied and intersubjective phenomenon, where L2 users constantly deliberate about how their linguistic action might be perceived by others, particularly so-called native speakers of Japanese. I elaborate on this view on competence throughout the empirical chapters.

Problematization of language competence can also surface, for example, when Japanese speakers switch into another language—most likely English—when interacting with L2 users. Takeuchi (2023a, 2025) describes such instances as *linguistic microaggression* that undermines legitimacy as L2 user of Japanese. The question of language choices in interaction thus surfaces as contentions of ascribed identity and speakerhood. However, she also observes this phenomenon in reverse. L1 users of English evaluate Japanese L2-English speakers' competence and exhibit a native speaker bias when reporting on their interactions.[21] We can see in this example that language competence functions as an ideology going beyond the language in question, but targets the perceived and ascribed status of the speaker (see also Theory Chapter Section 3.5.3 on conceptually more nuanced treatment of this phenomenon).

In summary, this overview points of inherently power asymmetries that come to the fore in interactions of L1 and L2 users (Liddicoat 2016). Assuming and ascribing such roles in interaction therefore needs to be analyzed as contextualized phenomenon, entailing immediate interactional goals, as well as with sociopolitical framings that offer slots of positioning to newcomers in the Japanese sociolinguistic ecology. As I propose in the next section, we need to recalibrate our analytic instruments in order to understand and interpret the lived experiences of L2 users of Japanese in contemporary Japan—specifically with regard to perceptions of competence across their repertoire.

[21] For a similar example in which an L2 user claims a higher competence in English in comparison to Japanese, see Chapter 0 on a narrative about workplace discourse.

3 Theory: Creating a Reflexive Loop

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will introduce the analytical concepts that guide the interpretative process through this thesis. These concepts are central to my analyses in the empirical part, but also applied in the methodology chapter. In the discussion chapter, I will revisit the concepts considering the findings from the empirical part and address some theoretical implications of this study.

I build this chapter around the idea of a *reflexive loop* that ties the central concepts—*the lived experience of language*, *stance*, *metapragmatics*, and *competence*—together. They are weaved into a more tangled web of conceptual tools that help achieve oscillation between *scales* (Blommaert 2007; Carr & Lempert 2016b), zooming into the minute details of interaction, zooming out into the realm of social structures (Silverstein 2021).

3.2 Experience

In the following extract of an interview, Rebecca, an Australian research student at a Japanese university, talks about her experiences of using Japanese. This example illustrates the relevance of experience and its connection to emotions, both necessary for understanding perceptions of languages and competences. I will use this example throughout Section 3.2 to introduce *experience* and adjacent concepts. In this context, Rebecca compares different languages in her linguistic repertoire. I ask how she feels when using them.

Extract 3.1: Nervousness

01	Rebecca:	japanese feels a lot- sort of less intuitive,
02		so like [when i'm in situations where i'm speakin japanese,
03	Florian:	[mhm.
04	Rebecca:	.hh ye know it feels more like situations of >ye know<
05		feeling like cold wind on your fac:e. or li[ke !flu!shing,

06	Florian:	[okay ya.
07	Rebecca:	or feelin like (.)
08		like a sense of like nervousness or something like that,
09	Florian:	[mhm.
10	Rebecca:	[an that's why (.) i associate it with like (.)
11		being kind of like on my skin:, [my- my cheeks an- an my stomach.
12	Florian:	[mhm.

Central to this investigation are *utterances*. I use this expression to refer to the product of *speech*, which is always situated in an intersection of time, space, and the body of the speaker.

The talk occurred in November 2022, when I was interviewing her with two other friends in a city in western Tokyo area. Rebecca describes how she feels when speaking

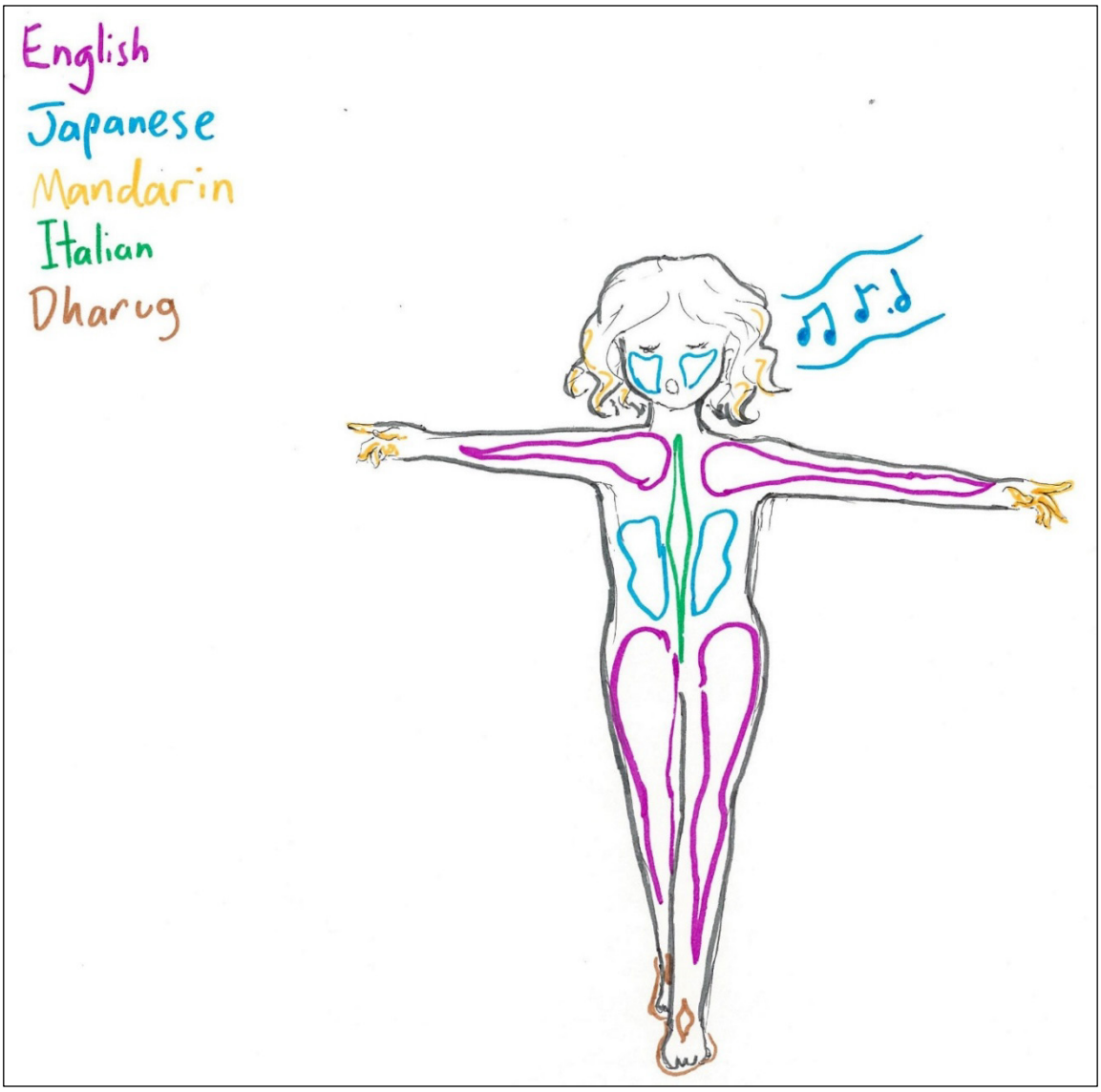


Figure 2. Rebecca's language portrait (November 2022)

Japanese. For her, using Japanese is less intuitive (line 1) than English, the language she grew up with. She talks about situations where she uses Japanese (line 4). Her feelings are mixed, talking in Japanese feels cold like wind on her cheeks, and hot like flushing (line 5). She feels nervous (line 8), and speaking Japanese engenders a somatic response in her body. Rebecca's language portrait (Figure 2) visualizes the emotional evaluations she holds toward her languages.

During the interview, I asked Rebecca to draw a portrait of herself, indicating the languages she feels connected to. I explain this method of creating language portraits in detail in the Methods Chapter (Section 4.2.4). Language portraits are a visual representation of a person's felt affiliation with language and their own body. Rebecca locates Japanese in blue on the skin of her cheeks and in her stomach (line 11). This portrayal visualizes the connection between her body and speaking Japanese. The situation of using Japanese is associated with nervousness and flushing that shows on her skin and is felt within her body. Using language has a somatic dimension, speaking is connected to emotions, for example, of nervousness, which form the basis of more complex experiences (Kramsch 2009). At the same time, Rebecca told me that she likes to sing Japanese songs, indicated with the blue notes next to her mouth. I will explore concepts of speaking and feeling further below, but before that, I distinguish what Rebecca calls "situations" in this extract.

3.2.1 Situations, events, moments

Rebecca talks about *situations* where she uses Japanese. We can frame this expression as a sociological concept. Goffman (1964: 135) sees a social situation "as an environment of mutual monitoring possibilities, anywhere within which an individual will find himself [sic] accessible to the naked senses of all others who are 'present,' and similarly find them accessible to him [sic]." A social situation, in this definition, requires more than one individual to engage in some form of interaction, as interaction is constituted by co-presence. Situations not necessarily consist of only verbal activity but associations to what kind of speech occurs in such settings, as Hymes (1967: 19) holds that "[w]ithin a community one readily detects many situations associated with (or masked by the absence of) speech." To understand situations, I introduce an even more basal notion for descriptive analysis, i.e., the *event*. To make the context of utterances into an analyzable unit, I segment sequential interactions into events that consist of acts and activities. The interview can be understood broadly as a speech

situation in which events of speaking occur. The notion of event in linguistic analysis goes back to Jakobson (1971) who distinguishes events into *speech event*, the event in which an utterance occurs, and *narrated event*, the event talked about. Hymes (1967: 19) claims that events are "restricted to activities, or aspects of activities, that are directly governed by rules for the use of speech." Utterances thus occur in events in which speech is subject to norms of production.

In studies that take positioning theories and narrative as vantage points of analysis, the expression *speech event* is exchanged with *narrating event* (Wortham & Reyes 2021). Narrating foregrounds how the self relates to events in other times and places and with other people within the production of an utterance, for example, while producing a story. For Rebecca, the other is present in the social situation where she speaks Japanese, even though such other is absent in the narrating event of the interview. By looking at events, we take on a *third-person perspective* (Busch 2017: 341), which makes events a convenient unit to analyze from an interactional angle. While the discourse analyst takes *events* at the units of investigation, biographical and narrative approaches explore *moments*, and how a subject experiences and recollects moments, as chronotopic and affective units of analysis (Li 2011). I use the expression *moment* to describe a focal event (or sequence of events) in a situation that my interlocutors make relevant in their narrative accounts. A moment indicates a shift in one's thinking, feeling, or acting.[22]

As utterances are produced by speakers, there must be a *body* to produce them. With this shift, we take on a first-person, subjective perspective (Busch 2021 [2013]). Focusing on the subject, we need to ask how they make sense of themselves and others' actions through language in and across events (Goffman 1986; Wortham & Reyes 2021)? To answer this question, we need to look at subjects and their experiences in life.

3.2.2 The speaking subject

Some strands in linguistics view language as an innate cognitive ability, while phenomenologically oriented applied linguistics highlights the bodily, sensorial, and emotional aspects of speech. "Bodies and embodiment are central to the production,

[22] Note that this understanding of *moments* is a theoretical expansion and not detectable just from the extract and portrait that I introduce in this section.

perception, and social interpretation of language," as Bucholtz & Hall (2016: 173) claim. For Rebecca, using Japanese is clearly embodied, it evokes specific bodily responses that she visualizes in her language portrait, flushing on her cheeks and a feeling in her stomach.

Individuals produce meaningful behavior by drawing on other signs and bodily behavior, along with language (Duranti 1992). Rebecca moves her hands to her cheeks when she describes the cold wind on her face and the flushing when speaking Japanese (line 5). Other signs that individuals draw on are body posture and facial expressions that form part of an individual's *hexis* (Bourdieu 1977), corporeal behavior that is brought into every interaction. Such subtle movements of the body sediment over repeated use and then feed into a person's *habitus*, that is an ensemble of communicative conduct and inscribed spatiotemporal trajectories of socialization that form a person's identity and are also brought into interactional encounters (Bourdieu 1991). The body is always situated in the social.

The act of uttering words, or, in a broader semiotic framework, composing communicative signs, is one component that makes a human subject into a *speaking subject*. Bakhtin tells us that "[s]peech is always cast in the form of an utterance belonging to a particular speaking subject, and outside this form it cannot exist" (1986: 71). I understand being a *speaking subject* here as someone who acts beyond producing utterances. Every utterance is accompanied by a myriad of other signs. In this research tradition, *speaking* stands as an encompassing (and perhaps at times too simplifying) bundle of reception and production, including understanding, hearing/listening (see Flubacher & Purkarthofer 2022: 12–14), writing, signing, in other words, *using* signs.

If one speaks, there needs to be another subject that *perceives* the speech. The body and its capacity for sensation, its ability to produce and perceive signs is at the center of Merleau-Ponty's (2012 [1945]) phenomenological work on perception. The body is simultaneously subject and object of perception. Rebecca's body feels the sensation of using Japanese while at the same time flushing becomes an object of her perception. The perceiving body, we see, is a resource to form any connection to the world. Speakers may signal these connections in discourse.[23] These signals range from subtle shifts in how an utterance is vocally produced to explicit formulations of such perceptions in discourse. Subtle shifts are Rebecca's emphasis on key words related to the sensation of speaking Japanese in line 5, "cold wind on your face"

[23] With regard to sensations, Wittgenstein (1973: §243-315) speculates to what extent individuals can access the sensations of others. This foreshadows the issue of *intersubjectivity* that I address in Section 3.3.1.

(see also emphasis on "nervousness" and "skin, cheeks, and stomach" in lines 8 and 11). However, speaking is only one way in which language helps to shape subjectivity. In the process of *subjectivation*, people use language to discursively produce a subject in repeated speech events that refer to or characterize an individual and therefore render them "recognizable" as a person (see, e.g., Althusser 2014 [1971]; Butler 2021 [1997]; Foucault 1991 [1972]). Individuals may frame moments of subjectivation as experiences, to which I turn next.

3.2.3 Lived experiences

The use of the expression *experience* exhibits two meanings. Experience is a kind of knowledge, particularly procedural knowledge ("how to do things"), which is reflected in the expression *Erfahrung* in German (see also *expertus* in Latin). I will come back to ideas about this type of experience when I connect it with evaluative practices that grant or deny *competence* to expressions of linguistic experience (Section 5.1). In this section, I focus on a second dimension of experience that features in the German expression *Erleben*, that is a *lived experience*. This concept foregrounds bodily, sensorial, and affective dimensions of experience. Lived experience develops through immediate sensorial and perceptual access to the world (for more nuanced philosophical theorizations, see Husserl 2017 [1900-1901]; Nishida 1979 [1911]). In this thesis, I look at how lived experience is connected to language. Busch proposes the concept of *the lived experience of language* (*Spracherleben*, Busch 2021 [2013]) to capture "the bodily and emotional dimension of intersubjective interaction" (Busch 2017: 341) in which language is the central means to communicate. In the short example, Rebecca describes her lived experience of using Japanese by drawing on bodily (skin, cheeks, and stomach in the narrated event, but also her hands moving to her cheeks in the narrating event), emotional (e.g., nervousness), and perhaps cognitive resources (e.g., intuition). A lived experience is grounded in perceptions of the self and perception of the other. Intersubjective interaction will be explored further in Section 3. A lived experience of language also resonates with Ochs' proposal to understand language from a phenomenological perspective. She argues "to view ordinary enactments of language as *modes of experiencing the world*" (Ochs 2012: 149, emphasis in original). In this view, every utterance projects a speaker's emotional calibration toward their lifeworld in the moment of enunciation. A rhythmic pattern in stress can be detected in line 5 of Extract 3.1 ("feeling like cold wind on your fac:e. or li[ke !flu!shing,").

The cadence gives us an impression of how narrated experience unfolds in narration. I will detail some more linguistic markers that show how an utterance connects to expression of experience in Section 3.3.3. The *Spracherleben* concept is at the core of my investigation of multilingual subjects in Japan.

To tie language, language use, and communication to lived experience means to anchor it in the bodies of speaking subjects. While interactional and discursive perspectives have been prominent in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, subjective and speaker-centered approaches are gaining more traction in recent years (Busch 2021 [2013]; Purkarthofer & Flubacher 2022). These approaches build on phenomenological insights and view interaction in line with speaking subjects' perceptions of these interactions, contextualized in sociohistorical biography. Action-in-interaction and perceptions thereof are later introduced and discussed as aspects of a subject's *stance* (Section 3).

I have hitherto used the expression *emotion* without definition. A lived experience of language is formed in moments or series of events through affect and emotion. I understand *affect* as an individual's response that is instigated in their body (flushing in a speech event). Affective practices are habituated, reiterations of bodily responses to sensations when engaging with the outside world (Wetherell 2012), while *emotions* are more complex and directed ensembles of responses that rely on intersubjective evaluation (nervousness because of speaking Japanese in a situation).[24]

The relationship between language and emotions has been explored in two ways. First, how emotions are encoded in language, and second, how individuals discursively attach emotional ascriptions to language(s), language use, and their repertoire (Sevinç & Mirvahedi 2023). Both perspectives will be pursued in the empirical part. The next section explores how speaking subjects direct their orientation toward people, objects, and events in discourse.

3.3 Stance

The following example illustrates how speakers direct their attention in discourse. In the extract, Chen and her partner Junya are talking at home. Chen is a Singaporean student at a

[24] Rosa (2016: 279–280) claims that affect is a movement from an object toward the perceiving body, as an individual is touched or moved by an entity in the world. Emotions, in contrast, emit from the perceiving body toward the object to access and interact with the world. See also Schwarz-Friesel (2013: 52–53) who describes affect as an intensive and non-intentional, uncontrollable reaction to an object.

university in Tokyo. Her partner Junya is Japanese. They talk about Junya's brother in this segment.

Extract 3.2: Why doesn't he move?

01	Chen:	chotto hataraiteru wake desho [o:.	*because he's working a bit, [ri:ght?*
02	Junya:	[ɯm:.	*[yeah.*
03	Chen:	shuunyuu aru jan.	*he's got an income.*
04	Junya:	maa ne. [soo da ne.	*well. [that's right.*
05	Chen:	[hikkoshi(.)takereba hikkoseru deshoo.	*[if he would(.) like to move, he could move.*
06	Junya:	ɯm:. [( )	*yeah. [( )*
07	Chen:	[nande hikkosanai no?	*[why doesn't he move?*
08	Junya:	i think she finds- he: finds it comfortable to live [with	
09	Chen:	[i suppose when you don't need to do your own (.)	
10		!laun!dry an[d do housework and [think of foo:d [>think about food< ne.	
11	Junya:	[ɯn. sososo. [sosososo. [°sososo.°	

Junya's brother still lives with the parents and does not want to move. They recorded their talk at Chen's home (see more on this method in Section 4.2.3). Chen reasons that the said brother is working, has an income, and she is wondering why he does not move then (lines 1, 3, 5, 7). Junya acknowledges these statements with response tokens *ɯm:* in overlapping turns (lines 3, 4, 6). In this example, Chen and Junya take *stance toward* the brother's inaction.

3.3.1 Components of stance

Subjects become social actors by orienting their attention to a *stance object* in discursive interaction (the narrating or speech event). The object in Extract 3.2 is the behavior of Junya's brother. The investigation of how speakers display their orientation and attention toward contents and interlocutors in discourse has become analytically operationalized as concept of *stance* (see, for example, the edited volumes by Englebretson 2007; Jaffe 2009b). The following widely quoted definition serves as a starting point:

> Stance is a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means, of simultaneously evaluating objects, positioning subjects (self and others), and aligning with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field. (Du Bois 2007: 163)

In the example, Chen evaluates the brother's inaction, positioning herself as questioning his living choices. Stances emerge through dialogic interaction; it is publicly enacted by subjects and taken up or responded to by others. Chen evaluates Junya's brother's financial situation and Junya responds to her statements. A stance cannot be understood as a private mental state (Kärkkäinen 2006). In this process, subjects orient to objects and other subjects. The condition for a stance to emerge is thus *intersubjectivity*. Intersubjectivity refers to a shared, mutual acknowledgment of the other's subjectivity (in this case, between Chen and Junya). Between subjects, understanding and meaning arises through perception, social interaction, and communication (Enfield & Sidnell 2022). Intersubjectivity delineates a relational space in which individual experiences converge, enabling people to recognize one another as subjects with minds, intentions, and perspectives. A subject's orientation to the stance taken by another subject, for instance, in a prior turn, [25] is located on a continuum of *alignment* (Du Bois 2007) or *interactional positioning* (Wortham & Reyes 2021). In this thesis, I use *alignment* as variable and dynamic outcomes of interaction. Alignment should not be reduced to a dichotomy between agreement and disagreement, but alignments variably shift moment-by-moment in interaction (Du Bois & Kärkkäinen 2012: 447, Note 1). Furthermore, Du Bois (2007: 162) explains that alignment is scalar, located on a continuum between convergence and divergence. Junya aligns with Chen with respect to her description of his brother's financial situation (lines 2, 4, 6, 11). But he shifts his understanding for his brother's unwillingness to move in line 8, where he explains that his brother finds it comfortable to live at their parents' place.

Kockelman defines stance as "those semiotically indicated modes of evaluative and intentional commitment that speakers take toward states of affairs, from epistemic possibility and necessity to deontic permission and obligation, from fear and desire to memory and disgust" (2004: 142–143). Stance in sociolinguistics (Jaffe 2009a) encompasses evaluative and interactive practices that exhibit speaking subject's knowledge, affect or emotion, and moral obligation or entitlement. This leads to a conceptual dismantling of stance into *epistemic*, *affective*, and *deontic* stances (Couper-Kuhlen & Selting 2018: 1–54; Ochs 1992, 1996; Jaffe 2009a: 7). A stance act can therefore contain displays of *knowledge* about an object, situation,

[25] Alignment is also formed beyond subsequent turns, as stances are also taken intertextually over timescales that span days, weeks, months, or even years (e.g., Damari 2010; Thompson 2016). See also Agha (2007a: 96–103) on *role alignment* that forms over iterative stances that show affiliation with a social persona.

or other subject (hence, epistemic). Chen exhibits her knowledge about the existence of the brother's job and income. [26] A stance act contains a display of *emotion* or *affect*. Chen speculates that the brother does not want to move because he does not need to do his laundry and care about food preparation at home. Her voice (rhythm and stress, louder volume on "laundry") points to slight disapproval. Stances can also display configurations of *accountability and moral commitment* (deontic). Chen's stance indicates that the brother should start thinking about moving, now that he has a job and a stable income.

From a multimodal and embodied perspective, stance includes more dimensions, such as *instrumentality*, i.e., the configuration of material resources to accomplish action, and *cooperation*, an orientation of bodies toward each other for joint action (Goodwin 2007: 70).

As stances emerge from interaction, they are understood as a process and associated with activity, which is highlighted in predication of stance. *To take a stance* thus yields the concept of *stancetaking* which emphasizes its processual and temporal nature. Stances are temporally constituted through a subject's ongoing perception and semiosis. In this thesis, I also examine the linguistic encoding of stance, that is the resources for *stance building* (Morita 2015). Some relevant resources will be introduced in Section 3.3.3. To understand the theoretical underpinnings of the process of connecting resources to stances in a more systematic way, I draw on Ochs' (1990, 1992) model of *indexicality* and stance.

3.3.2 Indexicality

Based on semiotic concepts proposed by Peirce (1867), indexicality has become one of the most productive theoretical concepts in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology (Jaffe 2016). An index points to something, as it is a sign standing in a mediated *contingent* or *causal* relationship to an object. Via an interpretant or interpretive process instigated by sign perception, subjects construct a sign-object relation. Therefore, an index can only be interpreted by its perceivers in context.

Silverstein (1976) forged out two dimensions of indexicality, *presupposing*, context-containing and presuming indices, and *entailing*, context-creating indices. Deictics such as *here* or *this* presuppose that there is an entity which is spatially or conceptually close to the speaker. The epistemic stance markers that Chen uses to index knowledge about the brother's

[26] This knowledge is encoded with the epistemic stance marker *deshoo* in Japanese (Cook 2012).

financial situation transform the context on which she bases her question on why he does not want to move out of the parent's home (line 7). These are conceptual distinctions and indices can point into both directions at the same time or in a loop, while interactionally being registered as *appropriate* or *effective* in its context of occurrence (Silverstein 1976, 2003). Any sign can become an index, but indices stand in a mediated relationship to the social context and categories they point to. Ochs' (1992) model of indexicality shows how a linguistic resource directly indexes a stance that, in the next step, indexes a social construct. The resource and the construct, therefore, are only *indirectly* connected to each other via *acts* and *activities* that are linked (Ochs 1992: 342). Indirectness means that a linguistic form is not mapped one-to-one onto a category. Instead, it indexes a stance that stands in a constitutive, associative relation to the social construct.

The act of code-switching between Japanese and English in Chen and Junya's conversation indexes not only the capacity for them to communicate in both languages, but points to a practice commonly seen in international couples (see, e.g., Gonçalves 2013b; Piller 2002). Indices can contextually take on various meanings, as they are *ordered* (Silverstein 2003, see also Garfinkel 1984 [1967]: 11). This means that their interpretations, evaluations, and usage are organized within social domains, often in a hierarchical manner. Signs may index a direct act that is associated with a social persona, or more complex webs of meanings. For example, a rising pitch in a voice may index a question, or it may be associated—along with other signs—with the citation of another's voice (reported speech or constructed dialogue, see Section 3.4.3 for a detailed description) and stereotypical associations of personae. Meanings are therefore activated from a *field* of indexical meanings that are available for interpretation (Eckert 2008).[27] It is important to note that variables or resources in this field are "ideologically linked" (Eckert 2008: 464), connected by expectations, assumptions, and beliefs users hold about forms and their use.[28]

In the approach to discourse analysis that I pursue in this thesis, any index that points to avenues of interpretation, in other words, to make sense of what is happening in discourse and how interactants position themselves and others, is called an *indexical expression*

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[27] Eckert (2008: 473) remarks that she understands field in a different sense to Bourdieu's usage and what I delineate as field as part of *fieldwork* in the next chapter as a part of data collection.

[28] This foreshadows the concept of the *total linguistic fact* (Silverstein 1985: 220) that mediates language system, use, and ideology (see also Spitzmüller 2026). I understand this concept also as an analytic viewpoint, so I elaborate on it in Section 4.3.4.

(Garfinkel 1984 [1967]; Wortham & Reyes 2021), an expression of the—at times temporary, (un)stable and hence variable—outcome of a mode of semiosis. These expressions are *resources for stancetaking*.

3.3.3 Resources for stancetaking

Which forms and which structures can become indexical of a stance? Examining these resources is at the core of discourse analysis, as "social meaning is built into linguistic practice at every level of the linguistic system" (Eckert 2019: 769). In this subsection, I review some of the resources that are relevant to the analysis in the empirical part of this thesis. A more complex resource, *citational repetition*, will be discussed in Section 3.4.3.

The utterance and its form are constituents of a stance. The *indexical potential of the voice* can be activated via emphasis, stress, and prosodic modulation, for example, when marking an utterance with a high-low intonational contour, creaky voice, or whisper. Stressing a certain word through lengthening, or uttering it in a louder or softer voice, provide cues for the listener as to how to interpret an utterance (Gumperz 1982: 100–129). In both examples, we can see how the speakers put stress on the expressions that index their stance toward Japanese, in Rebecca's case, or toward the behavior of Junya's brother in the second example.

Modulations of the voice portray a relationship between indexicality and iconicity. *Iconicity* is the quality of a sign to bear perceivable resemblance to the objects it stands for. *Indexical iconicity* (Silverstein 2003: 203) is a specific type of semiotic relation in which resemblance and contingence/causality converge. Thompson (2016: 37) shows that "prosodic behavior embodies stance as an indexical icon, simultaneously pointing to and standing for a stance." For example, the modulation of pitch or voice register stands for (as an *icon*) the experience an individual makes when movement and changes in their life pathway occur. It is a projection through performance of the voice that resembles via the shifts in a person's life via intonational contouring. This may include changes at the workplace or in a relationship. At the same time, the modulation of voice points to (as an *index*) the stance that the speaking subject takes toward these moments and events, such as a stance of appreciating, resisting, or reevaluating change (see also Harkness 2014: 196 for examples of indexical iconicity).

Syntactic structure builds another resource to take stance. *Dialogicality* or *dialogic syntax* (Du Bois 2014) shows how speakers' utterances *resonate* across turns through selective

repetition or substitution of expressions. The condition for building dialogic syntactic structures is *metricalization*, the segmenting and chunking of textual elements and segments within an utterance. Agha (2007a: 98) claims that *metrical structure* of "fractional congruence of stances and alignments is only definable over an unfolding text structure containing many semiotic cues, some of which are highly congruent with each other." Prosody is one semiotic cue. For example, one effect that metricalization creates is *rhythm* through repetition. Tannen (2006: 600) describes that "[r]epetition creates sound patterns—the musical level of language, including rhythm, intonation, and prosody—that involve the audience with the speaker or writer and the discourse by sweeping them along, much as music sweeps listeners along, luring them to move in its rhythm." In line 10 and 11 in the second example (Extract 3.2), we can see how Chen creates a rhythm through repetition of stress on "laundry, housework, food" that exemplarily point to potential reasons why the brother is unwilling to live by himself.

A metrical organization of signs becomes meaningful as a poetic configuration of interactional text (Jakobson 1960; Kataoka et al. 2022; Lempert 2008; Silverstein 1984). In the empirical part, I will present examples of repetition and *parallelism*—"repetition with semantic substitutions" (Silverstein 2023: 42)—in narratives that L2 speakers of Japanese use to give an account of how they experience interactions with L1 users (cold wind or flushing in Rebecca's account in Extract 3.1). An analysis of the resources to build a stance therefore gives access to understanding their experiences. Parallelism is also built across speakers. Chen's enumeration of three activities related to being responsible for chores is resonated with Junya's overlapping acknowledgments in line 11 (Extract 3.2).

There is a myriad of other linguistic resources that can index a stance. For example, any kind of evaluative expression (Wortham & Reyes 2021: 53–55) can be used to mark a stance, including markers of evidentiality and modality, and resources to scale or shift *intensity* (Kockelman 2022; Labov 1984).[29]

Another component of the stancetaking act is what Kiesling (2020, 2022) calls *investment* in his stancetaking framework and what he defines as "the extent to which an animator (Du Bois's 'subject') commits to the evaluation/positioning—the extent to which they wish to become aligned with being the principal of the evaluation" (Kiesling 2022: 420). The distinction between *animator*, *author*, and *principal* was devised by Goffman (1979: 17): an

[29] Ochs (1990: 296) explains that (direct) indexical meanings bear on intensity that is based on experiential quality, for example, the sound of a harsh or soft voice associated with Japanese interactional particles.

animator produces an utterance, an author expresses it with words, and a principal conveys a position through these utterances and words. Chen shows a high degree of investment of her stance toward the brother's lifestyle, indicated with repeated use of the epistemic stance marker *deshoo*. Junya agrees with her on the denotational level, but displays less commitment in his stance. The switch to English when he speculates about his brother's reasons for not moving out could also index lower investment. Another interpretation could be that by using English, he wants to detach himself a bit from the responsibility to provide a motivation for his brother's behavior (with whom he presumably uses Japanese). The notion of investment in a stance in similar to what Kockelman (2004: 127) calls a *commitment event*. In a commitment event, animator and principal (Goffman 1979) are distinguished, and this distinction is morphosyntactically encoded. In the second example, Chen is the animator of the utterance 'if he would want to move, he could move' (*hikkoshi(.)takereba hikkoseru deshoo* in line 5), but commitment is shifted to Junya's brother. This is indexed with the hypothetic conditional suffix *-kereba*. Opening a commitment event allows for configuring claims to accountability that I will address in Section 3.3.6 of this chapter.

3.3.4 Positioning and alterity

As an individual's stance emerges in response to stances taken by other individuals, we wonder what interactants want to achieve by forming a (new) stance.[30] This process can be captured by looking at interactants' tactics of *positioning*, the ways in which they produce selves in discursive interaction by drawing on a history of prior experiences (Davies & Harré 1990). While positioning is one angle in Du Bois' stance triangle, it takes on a more central role in other approaches that view positioning as a way to form alignment and create ways of identification (Wortham 2000). We move here from an interaction-focused view toward a more identity-focused view on stance. Identification is achieved through positioning by conveying a stance that aligns with *role types* (Agha 2005), ideas such as being a competent or less competent speaker of a language, or a confident or modest/humble learner of a language, a migrant in Japan, a wife, a partner, a co-worker, and so on. Positioning, however, is defined "as a dynamic alternative to the more static concept of role" (van Langenhove & Harré 1999:

[30] Or, speaking from a less intentionalistic perspective, what the discursive effects of stancetaking are. That means how a stance yields further stances in a sequence of continuous stancetaking acts.

14).[31] I adopt such a dynamic and relational view on positioning practices. In this sense, stances become connected to *identity* of individuals by enacting *tactics of intersubjectivity* in discourse (Bucholtz & Hall 2004). Bucholtz & Hall (2004, 2005) propose three pairs of tactics.

Table 1. Tactics of intersubjectivity

adequation	**distinction**	**authentication**	**denaturalization**	**authorization**	**illegitimation**
creation of sameness and difference		creation of authentic/genuine or fake essentiality		creation, attribution and withdrawal of power	

The empirical part of the thesis will show that the tactics of *distinction* and *illegitimation* are particularly salient in L2 users' discourse about Japanese communicative practices. Distinction has received attention in studies that highlight that identity and its performance or enactment can only be understood when viewing it as emerging in relation to the other, thereby highlighting *alterity* (Hastings & Manning 2004). Speakers display a *stance of alterity* in which interactional positions and meanings are merged to foreground relation of difference to the other (Ball 2004, 2015). Gradations between sameness and difference therefore unite in an individual's sense of self (Bamberg 1997, 2022; Bucholtz & Hall 2004, 2005). Alterity in stancetaking is a basal notion on which more socially critical phenomena are modeled, such as disagreement, disharmony, and conflict. Takekuro (2018) subsumes these phenomena under the label *discordance*. We need to keep in mind, however, that alterity does not necessarily yield discordance.

3.3.5 Accretion and attribution

Forms of identification are, however, only accomplished through reiteration of stances, forming stancetaking practices. Stances *accrete* to form recognizable and more enduring personae and identities (Du Bois 2002), while still being permeable and malleable enough for undergoing transformation. While it is possible to investigate habitual stancetaking or stance accretion over temporal scales (see also Thompson 2016), speakers may also *present* someone else's stance. We view them

[31] Note here, however, that Goffman did not devise the concept of role to be so static, as van Langenhove & Harré claim. For example, refer to Goffman (1959: 141–166) from which we can see that he views roles as contingent on situated performance.

> as accreted stances in order to emphasize that, while the present speaker indicates that the reported or constructed stance is 'perennially salient' and 'accumulated in the run of … several conversations,' it is of course impossible to know how many times the constructed stance was actually taken and whether, in fact, the stance is reconstructed accurately." (Damari 2010: 616)

The presentation of someone else's stance is therefore also a *presentation of self* within the specific interactional context (Goffman 1959), such as an interview. In a presentation, speakers may *attribute* a stance to a narrated person, thereby positioning themselves and others. Coupland & Coupland (2009: 246) define *stance attribution* as follows:

> Stance attribution is a discursive resource for speakers or writers to map their own evaluations, attitudes, and aspirations onto other people. It provides opportunities for ideological transfer. This transfer is far from automatic or inevitable, and there are many instances when transfer is not the intended outcome.

In extract 2, Junya and Chen attributes a stance of being comfortable at home with their parents to Junya's brother. Stance attributions, we see, not only foreground the evaluative potential of the effects of taking a stance, but that speakers display and ascribe *accountability* (Enfield & Sidnell 2017, 2022) or *intentionality* (e.g., Duranti 2015) to narrated characters. I will explore these components of a stance next.

3.3.6 Accountability and intentionality

Every display of a stancetaking act can undergo scrutiny by other social actors. Discursive interaction "serves to activate the tyranny of accountability through which social relations are constituted" (Enfield & Sidnell 2017: 53). In social interaction, *adjacency pairs*, such as question-answer sequences, allow questioners to hold their interlocutors to account for answering the question. In this thesis, I am more interested in a broader notion of accountability. In the empirical part, I will present examples of how L2 users of Japanese hold (past) interlocutors—narrated (Japanese) people and characters—to account for communicative behavior, in order to rationalize their own communicative behavior toward me in interviews about their lived experiences. Moves that address accountability in talk point to a higher-order process of *ascribing intentionality* to others' behavior.

Intentions have been a contested topic in anthropology and philosophy (Duranti 2023). For Merleau-Ponty (2012 [1945]) and other phenomenologists, intentionality is the mental direction toward an object (see also Searle 1983). An individual's intentions, therefore, have

often been understood as mental states that are difficult to access and apprehend by others. Robbins & Rumsey (2008) call this phenomenon the *opacity of other minds*. They claim that people in most societies encounter moments in which they ponder over other people's thoughts. In the second example, Chen ponders over Junya's brother's motivations why he does not seem willing to move out. In contrast, in some societies and communities, verbal speculations about other's minds and intentions are less prevalent (Duranti 2015; Ochs 1990: 298).

In the Japanese context, researchers have explored emic concepts denoting an orientation towards the others' thoughts needs, building to consideration, attentiveness, and empathy (Fukushima 2019; Obana & Haugh 2023). This sociopragmatic research centers on politeness practices and their connection to ascriptions of intentionality. Japanese communicative practices have ideologically been described as exhibiting relatively high degrees of considerations and social actors' orientation toward others (Fukushima & Haugh 2014; Fukushima & Sifianou 2017).

Adopting a meta-view on intentionality, philosophers, anthropologists and some pragmatics researchers have moved to explore intentions as they emerge in action and interaction (Anscombe 1957; Arundale 2008; Duranti 2015; Enfield & Sidnell 2017).[32] Within an interactionist framework, Gumperz (1982: 153) proposes *conversational inference* as "the situated or context-bound process of interpretation, by means of which participants in an exchange assess others' intentions, and on which they base their responses." Intentions are interpreted in interaction, which shows "how the structure of intentionality, rather than being situated within the mind of a single individual, might be distributed within the interactive context" (Goodwin & Duranti 1992: 18). In the second example, we see how a joint direction toward the brother's intentions is interactionally created between Chen and Junya as an emerging process, unfolding in sequential interaction.

Rather than trying to venture the uncharted terrain of my participants' mental states, I want to shed light on how they make intentionality relevant in discourse, in other words, how they disclose and display their rationalizations and interpretative work about others' motivations to me. To achieve this, we need another component of the stancetaking process that indexes more or less overt orientation toward other's intentions, or what is often called *mind-reading* or *mind-guessing* (for example, Duranti 2015). To understand ascriptions or

[32] See also Faber (2022) for an autobiographically-informed approach to intentionality.

attributions of intentionality and their consequences in discourse, I argue, we need to embed such discourse within a *metapragmatic framework* (Rumsey 2013).

3.4 Metapragmatics

Metapragmatics is the study of how actors in discourse make sense of the pragmatics of communication (Hübler 2011). While the study of metapragmatics involves more modalities apart from reflecting on speech (see, Spitzmüller 2013a, 2015; Robertson 2017, 2021 for some examples on script; Kita & Ide 2007 for examples on nodding), I focus on the metapragmatics of utterances, i.e., in discursive spoken interaction, and how they connect to lived experiences, stance, and, in the final section, competence.

To illustrate the dimensions of metapragmatics, the following example serves as a starting point. It is taken from an interview I (FL) had with Katharina (KA), an Austrian friend, in June 2021 in Vienna, before she was about to move to Japan. In this example, Katharina talks about the importance of correct *keigo*, an honorific register of Japanese at the workplace

Extract 3.3: Correct keigo

01	KA:	< aber ich fi:nd, ((1,0)) wenn du:, >	*< but i thi:nk ((1,0)) if you: >*
02		(.) mhh wie soll man sagen?	*(.) mhh how should i say?*
03		> es ist trotzdem immer noch wichtig find ich	*> i think it's still important*
04		wenn du halt n vorgesetzten hast oder ne [höherstehende person <	*when you have a superior or a [someone in a higher position <*
05	FL:	[mhm.	*[mhm.*
06	KT:	>dass du< richtig keigo benutzen kannst.=	*>that you< can use keigo correctly=*
07	FL:	=mhm.	*=mhm.*
08	KT:	weil natürlich sagen dann immer alle	*because then of course everyone says all the time*
09		↑ > ja oke du bist ausländer du kannst das nicht, aber <	*↑ > yeah okay you're a foreigner you can't use it, but <*
10	FL:	[mh.	*[mh.*
11	KT:	[wenn ich dort vollwertig arbeit, dann will ich auch so anerkannt werden,	*[if i work there as a full member of the staff, i also want to be recognized as such,*
12	FL:	ja=	*yes=*

Katharina explains her understanding of the importance of *keigo* at Japanese workplaces to me. She is looking for the right words (line 2) to formulate her stance. Then, she describes the context in which she thinks *keigo* to be important, that is, when talking to your superiors (line

4). She gives the reason why it is important to her. People may say that "you're a foreigner, you can't use it" (line 9) which is framed in reported speech (see Section 3.4.3). Katharina then emphasizes that she wants to be recognized as a full employee if she were to work in Japan (line 11).

In the following sections, I disaggregate the components of a metapragmatic analysis in detail.

3.4.1 Reflexivity and functionalities

Silverstein (1976: 49) explains that "[t]he metapragmatic characterization of speech must constitute a referential event, in which pragmatic norms are the objects of description." Such characterization requires *reflexivity* that features in metapragmatic construals to varying degrees. [33] In metapragmatic inquiries, we focus on "[t]hose moments of discourse in which interactants define or organize their own communication" (Caffi 2016: 800). Katharina organizes her own communication explicitly with *(.) mhh wie soll man sagen?* (line 2). She is thinking aloud to find the right expression.

Reflexivity in language, although present early on in linguistic theory as *metalanguage* or *metalinguistic function* (Jakobson 1971, Jaworski et al. 2004), has assumed a central position in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology (Lucy 1993a). Reflexivity in language allows users to refer to or characterize language, thus enabling speakers to build a reflexive loop in and across speech events (Lucy 1993b; Taylor 2000). Silverstein (1993, 2021) forged out a complex semiotic granulation to exemplify various scales of metapragmatic functions and operations. While all these scales intersect in the discourse data that I analyze in this thesis, I briefly present his framework and address its relevance to analytic subdivision. He distinguishes two *statuses of denotation* (explicit and implicit), and three types of *indexical calibrations* (reflexive, reportive, and nomic). Calibration is the alignment, adjustment, and tuning of signs in text to co-text and context, and also in narrating events to narrated events.

Below is an overview of the metapragmatic functionalities applied to Extract 3.3, adapted from Silverstein 2021: 14).

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[33] See also Archer's (2003: 255) *meta-reflexivity* that describes an individual's internal conversation about their own utterances when reflecting on their pathways in life. Katharina shares this reflexivity when she talks about her prospective status as a non-Japanese individual at a Japanese workplace. She reflects on how she is linguistically perceived by co-workers.

Table 2. Metapragmatic functionalities applied to Extract 3.3

Denotational status	**Event indexical calibration type**		
	Reflexive (within-token)	**Reportive (type/ token-focus)**	**Nomic (type-focus)**
Implicit	Metricalization *wenn – dass* *wenn – dann* response token *mhm, mh*	Iconic indexicality the interview genre, involving question-answer frame	"Voicing" through enregisterment animating the voice of Japanese people and their stance toward foreigner's Japanese; not being able to use correct *keigo* at the workplace
Explicit	Deixis *ich, du, man, dort*	Citational repetition *↑ > ja oke du bist ausländer du kannst das nicht, aber <*	Rationalizing metadiscourse *> es ist trotzdem immer noch wichtig find ich wenn du halt n vorgesetzten hast oder ne [höherstehende person dass du < richtig keigo benutzen kannst.=* *[wenn ich dort vollwertig arbeit, dann will ich auch so anerkannt werden,*

Metricalization yields the structure of a text, here exemplified through syntactic and cross-turn chunking of discourse. *Deictics* can only be interpreted with context, for example, with *ich* Katharina refers to herself. Resources that establish a genre surface through *iconic indexicality*, for example, yielding the typical question-answer sequences of the interview. Katharina *cites* the voices of Japanese people and thereby animates and presents their voices as stable ideas (hence, *enregistered*) in the context of discourse about workplace procedures at Japanese companies (more on this resources in discourse is in Section 3.4.3). Lastly, she *rationalizes* use of correct *keigo* by referring to social hierarchy at a company and her subject position as a non-Japanese individual (more on this last calibration type in Sections 3.4.4 and 3.5.4).

3.4.2 Awareness, thematization, and metapragmatic stance

As can be anticipated from the distinct calibration types, not all features of language can readily be explicated in rationalizing metadiscourse, or *metapragmatic discourse* (Silverstein 1993; Wortham & Reyes 2021: 57–58). Awareness of features and how they are addressed in metapragmatic discourse may be limited (Silverstein 2001). Depending on interactional frame, however, speakers have different resources available to thematize features of language that may be at times difficult to bring to attention (Zuckerman & Enfield 2023), such as suprasegmental features, or pragmatic strategies to carry out speech acts in different languages.

Analysis of metapragmatic discourse examines indicators that point to a *metapragmatic awareness* (Verschueren 2004). These indicators encompass a large range of different resources that include *contextualization cues* (Gumperz 1982) and *shifters* (Jakobson 1971; Silverstein 1976). This vastness necessitates a restriction for the analyses in this thesis. I thus focus only on some cues or indicators that indicate speaking subjects' metapragmatic awareness toward how they calibrate their interpretations and rationalizations of lived experiences in relation to aspects of competence in and across languages. I will address these indicators in detail in the empirical chapters.

Metapragmatic acts exhibit two conditions for communication, the ability to express, or *expressibility* (Hübler & Bublitz 2007: 9), and *understanding*. I view expressibility as a person's expression of pragmatic *representational agency*, "the degree to which one can thematize a process, characterize a feature of this theme, and reason with this theme-character relation" (Kockelman 2007: 375). Katharina, for example, addresses expressibility for immediate interactional concern in line 2 in Extract 3.3.

I use *understanding* in delineation from the psychological or cognitive concept of *comprehension*.[34] Understanding is a metapragmatic process that speakers address and ensure through conversational documentation in order to verify their initial understanding of what is going on (Deppermann & Schmitt 2008; Deppermann 2015). A speaker's efforts to ensure understanding thus exhibits their awareness toward intentionality and intersubjectivity.

[34] Reisigl (2020) provides an overview of the concept of *understanding* (*Verstehen* in German) in applied linguistics.

With expression and understanding, I move metapragmatics closer to competence, as metapragmatic discourse about competence, as I will show later, is mainly concerned with issues of expressibility and intersubjective understanding (Section 3.5.4).

Next, I will situate the relevance of a metapragmatic perspective into a broader interactional and social realm. What do speaking subjects achieve in discourse by carrying out metapragmatic acts? This is necessary to understand how metapragmatics connects to lived experiences of language. To answer this question, Spitzmüller (2013b, 2015, 2022a) proposed a model that links metapragmatics with Du Bois' (2007) stance triangle, Agha's (2004, 2007a) concepts of personae, practices, and registers, and Bucholtz & Hall's (2004, 2005) tactics of intersubjectivity (Figure 3). He devises *metapragmatic stancetaking* as an interactive process. In this model, social actors evaluate language (use) or communication, in other words, *signs*. Thes signs are connected to socially enregistered types of people, or *personae* and *practices*. Social actors position themselves vis-à-vis the stance object to make claims about themselves. In the third example, we can see how Katharina evokes a persona, the "foreigner in Japan," and associated practices, such as struggles in adjusting to Japanese communicative norms at the workplace. This is a persona Katharina does not want to align with. She wants to adapt to norms and be perceived as a full-fledged member at her imagined future workplace in Japan. Metapragmatic stancetaking emerges as a tactic to configure social relations. In essence, talking about language is a way to position the self and others.

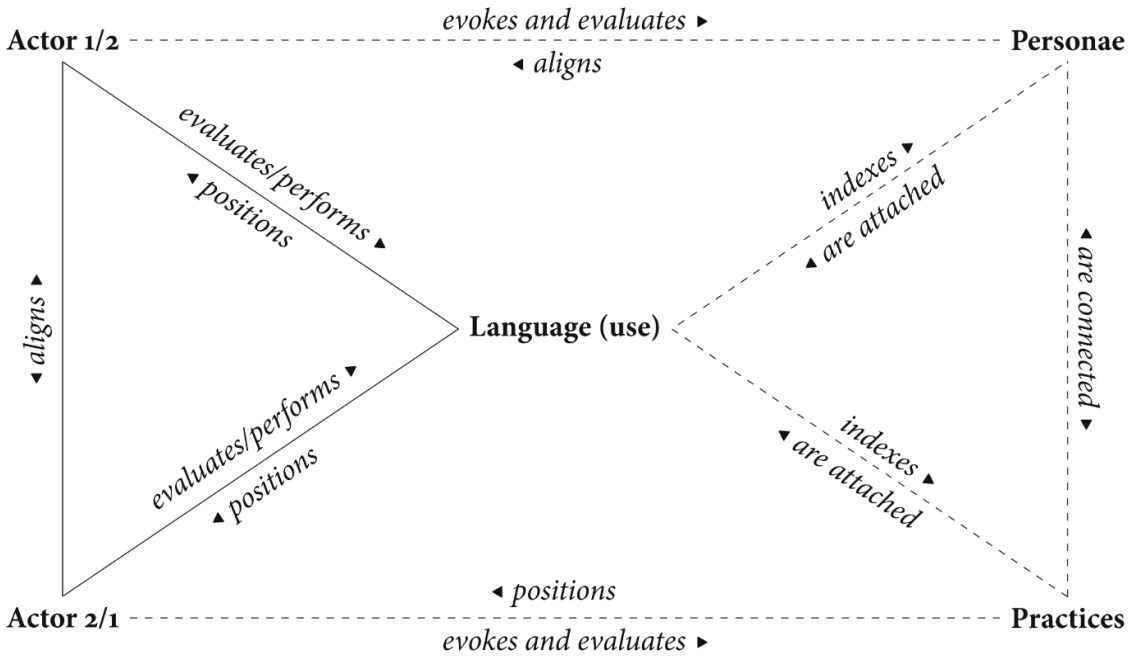


Figure 3. Metapragmatic stancetaking (Spitzmüller 2022a: 261)

Metapragmatic stances thereby loop back to the subject and the subject's lived experiences of using language. They also form the semiotic basis for articulating and framing *ideologies of language* or *communication* (see Section 3.4.4).

3.4.3 Citing, reporting, voicing

The calibration types particularly relevant to this investigation are what Silverstein calls *citational repetition* and *voicing*, the denotationally explicit, reportive and nomic calibration type. I understand citation in a very broad sense following Nakassis (2013) as a practice that is constitutive of subjectivities (Goodman et al. 2014). Citations are a subtype of *iterability* that provides the structural ability of signs to be repeated in a different context while retaining some degree of identity with their prior contextual embedding (Derrida 1988). Recall how Katharina cites the voices of Japanese people that excuse her from being able to correctly use *keigo* in workplace discourse (line 9 in Extract 3.3). The citation is framed with the *verbum dicendi sagen* ('say') and higher pitch. Deictics are shifted to "you" addressing her(self), being perceived as the persona of a foreigner not proficient in appropriate use of honorifics.

In my understanding of citationality, I subsume insights from phenomena that have been investigated as *reported speech*, with Vološinov's (1973 [1930]) foundation work. Subsequently, this phenomenon has gained attention in sociolinguistics and (linguistic) anthropology (for example, Coulmas 1986; Günthner 2002; Holt & Clift 2006; Lucy 1993a; Rumsey 2020; Wortham & Reyes 2021). Adjacent concepts are *represented speech* (Agha 2007a: 32), or *constructed dialogue* (Tannen 2007 [1989]). While the focus in these works has been on speech, citations are composed with broader semiotic arrays, including suprasegmentals, gestures, and facial expressions (Zuckerman 2021). The concepts introduced above refer to quoting the voice of another (or the self) in a narrow sense in contrast to the more encompassing concept of *citationality*. Nakassis (2013: 57) argues that "citationality refers to a more general property of (meta)semiosis: the ability to re-present an event of discourse while reflexively marking that representation as not(-quite) that which the citational act presences." The citational act, in this sense, highlights an event's difference to another event, while attempting to replicate, repeat, or, in a more figurative sense, *mime* this event. Borrowing Taussig's (2018 [1993]) terminology, *mimesis* is a performance of similarity that presupposes difference. Mimesis relies on alterity, as the other is evoked (or even a precondition) in the act of imitation (see

also Lempert 2014). Reporting what someone else has said frames it as the other's words, while infusing this act with components of an evaluative stance. Citations in discourse are therefore channels through which speakers transport stances of alterity and expressions of speakerhood. As Inoue aptly puts it: "When alterity 'speaks' in reported speech, it is no longer the speaker who is speaking" (2006: 49–50). In fact, every instance in which a speaker performs a citational act is simultaneously an act of stancetaking. It is precisely an act of *metapragmatic* stancetaking, as it characterizes speech, being reportively calibrated on a continuum of explicitness and implicitness. By citing the voices of Japanese people who claim that foreigners cannot (or do not need to) use *keigo* correctly, Katharina positions herself as an L2 user who wants to resist such typification by becoming able to use *keigo* appropriately, in order to become an accepted member of the Japanese workplace.

To understand the effects of this type of stancetaking, I also draw on the concept of *voice*. I addressed performances of the voice when reviewing some resources to take stance already (Section 3.3.3). Voice comes up here again, but not only in the physiological sense, but as a resource to portray perceptions of authority, intentionality, and accountability. A voice echoes speakers' divergent accesses to power and their ability to make themselves understood (Blommaert 2005). Speakers animate someone's voice in a citational frame to evoke "social types of persons, real or imagined, whose voices they take them to be" (Agha 2005: 38). In the third extract, Katharina speaks for Japanese people that address her as non-Japanese speaking subject. Through modulation of the physiological voice, speakers present a stance as that of an other, while in this very act they form a stance through which they position themselves vis-à-vis the other and the other's voice. Katharina's pitch rises and she speaks faster when citing the others. Prosodic modulation is one resource to compose the figure evoked in the citational act (Günthner 2002; Zuckerman 2021).

Bakhtin (1984) named the layering of voices *double-voiced discourse*, a speech event where multiple voices can be heard. Double-voiced discourse is an utterance that simultaneously carries the speaker's own intentional claims and the word of another, so that reported or cited speech serves two voices at once and refracts one through the other. A stancetaking act that relies on the affordances of citationality is one facet of *voicing*. Voicing establishes an interdiscursive pathway between real or constructed speech events (see the overview in Agha 2005: 43). Citations of such kind are seldom accurate reports of what another speaker has actually said (Tannen 2007 [1989]: 104), but constructed narrating events to establish a new position toward the purported cited speaker(s) or characters, and to create alignments with

personae that these voices evoke, as well as to the interlocutor. While Bakhtin (1981) noted that every utterance is always infused with voices of other speakers, citation through voicing reflexively marks alterity and foregrounds it as a lived experience of language in narrative accounts. In Katharina's report about what 'everyone' (*alle*, line 8) says about necessity of *keigo* competence, we can hear the others talking to her, and, at the same time, she is talking to herself and addresses me.

Voicing is, on the one hand, made possible because the citator has experienced or listened to someone else's voice. On the other hand, it can be a purely constructed citational act that illustrates the speaker's experience through intersubjective evocation. Through citational practices, speakers "depict embodied experiences of internalizing the view of Others" (Rydell 2018: 107). They serve as a resource to engineer ascriptions of intentionality (refer to my introduction to these concepts in Section 3.3.6).

Metapragmatic stancetaking provides the conceptual ground for exploring how speakers, signs, and practices are located in a social world (Spitzmüller 2022a). Looking at how speakers take stance toward language is the window that permits us to see how speakers make sense of language, language use, and communication. We now have to connect the concepts that are grounded in interactional analysis to a larger plane in which such interactions shape and are shaped by emanation and circulation of perceptions of personae and their practices. Such a view leads us to look at *ideologies* and their manifestations in and through discursive interaction.

3.4.4 Language ideologies and ideologies of communication

Metapragmatic investigations have become a central concern of linguistic analysis among Silverstein-affiliates. These investigations are now gradually forming into the emerging field of *metapragmatic sociolinguistics* (Spitzmüller 2022b: 222) that centers reflexivity, not only that of social actors, but also toward the field's epistemological and methodological assumptions and approaches. With the concept of a metapragmatic stance, this theory chapter moves into broader social realms to address how discursive interaction intersects with social regimentation, or *ideologies*. Ideas, beliefs, assumptions, and expectations about language structure and use have become "a flourishing field" (Truan & Jahns 2024: 1), since Silverstein's (1979) original formulation of the concept of *linguistic ideologies.* This concept later came to be reformulated as *language ideologies*, even though origins of research on

language and ideology can be traced much farther back (Spitzmüller 2024). Ideologies provide a frame to make sense of and make claims about issues of language and communication. Referring to Marx, Althusser states that "ideology is the system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group" (2014 [1971]: 253). In this quote, ideologies are conceptualized as ideas or mental states that guide action and that are imbued with distribution of power in a community or society (see also Mannheim 1929). Ideologies are therefore related to social positions that individuals occupy in community aggregations and may represent counter-factual assumptions, for example, about language, its users, and communicative practices (Woolard 1998: 5–7). Investigations of power, inequality, and authority among members of communities and speakers using certain accents, styles, registers, or languages have been a central concern in research on language ideologies (e.g., Bauman & Briggs 2003; Blommaert 1999; Cavanaugh 2009; Coupland & Jaworski 2004; Gal 1989, 1998; Gal & Irvine 1995, 2019; Irvine & Gal 2000; Kroskrity 2000; Schieffelin et al. 1998; Tsitsipis 2003; Woolard & Schieffelin 1994).

To illustrate how language ideologies come into being and how they semiotically operate in the world, Irvine & Gal (2000) have proposed a model to describe the ideological process that yields an *axis of differentiation* (e.g., Gal & Irvine 2019: 19), a framework where contrasts intersect. The processes involved are:

- *Iconization*, originally; now termed *rhematization*. A contrast is taken as a naturalized quality.
- *Fractal recursivity*. A (partial) projection of a contrast onto other scales.
- *Erasure*. Concealment and neglection of alternative perspectives.

Speakers make difference relevant in discourse by drawing on two interlocked communicative resources, *comparison* and *perspective* (Gal 2016; Gal & Irvine 2019). Individuals speak from or evoke a perspective by highlighting or downplaying aspects, often scaled and, and the same time, compared to other actual, possible, imagined horizons. For example, Katharina compares herself to other L2 users of Japanese and their use of *keigo*, as she does not want to be lumped together with individuals who are being excused of using correct honorifics. Other speakers in my fieldwork positioned themselves as more efficient worker or more culturally sensitive international individuals, speaking from their perspective of experience, by reflecting on ways to carry out speech acts, such as compliments or requests, in contrast to their Japanese interlocutors. What is more, for multilingual

speakers, comparing competences in languages (more on this in Section 3.5) is a common technique when disclosing interactional experiences to me in interviews. Gal & Irvine (2019) call the ways in which speakers enact such ideologies in discourse via the semiotic processes outlined in this section (essentially, metapragmatic stancetaking) *ideological work*. For the context of this investigation, I understand ideological work as a consequence of stancetaking.

In recent years, researchers expand the horizon of research on language ideologies, "keep[ing] linguistic signs at the center of [their] investigations, while not bounding them off from their myriad connections with other kinds of signs—bodily gestures and postures, clothing, script forms, spatial arrangements, and so on" (Irvine 2022: 228). While proposals to construe signs and ideologies in a broader sense have already been made (see, for example, Busch et al. 2022b; Gershon 2010; Keane 2018; Wilf 2014), Spitzmüller (2012: 256, 2022a) formulates a theory that locates ideologies about semiotic activity—along with language—within the broader notion of *ideologies of communication*, which are "sets of values and beliefs which are rooted in, and (re-)produced by, communicative practices, and which frame the perception and use of communicative practices" (Spitzmüller 2022a: 253).

One feature of ideologies is that they often go unnoticed, taken-for-granted, or commonsensical. Perspectives and practices are perceived as normal or ordinary because they are *discursively* made so (Kroo 2022; Link 1997; Sacks 1984). They are woven into the fabric of routinized interaction, but may become visible once routines are breached (Garfinkel 1984 [1967]). For example, moving to a different country takes us out of the known communicative routines into a realm where expectations might not be fulfilled. This can include not being sufficiently polite in workplace communication, or trouble communicating with the partner in a second language. These experiences in which expectations clash impact L2 users' perceptions of competence.

3.5 Competence

Competence is the last concept that is necessary to create a reflexive loop. In the following extract, I ask Ben, a Chinese professor at a university in northern Japan, about his understanding of *competence* in an interview. He answers:

Extract 3.4: Nooryoku

01	Ben:	((1,3)) dekiru koto da yo ne.	*((1,3)) it's the ability to do things.*
02	Florian:	~~u~~m.	*hm.*
03	Ben:	nooryoku tte.	*"competence"*

This short segment is taken from our interview in February 2023. We see a basal component of competence here: the ability to do things. Competence is framed with the quotative marker *tte* (Suzuki 2007). With this citation, he refers to my question about how he would define competence. I lift this citation out of its immediate interactional context, being the second part of an adjacency pair in the interview frame, and recontextualize it within a broader idea about competence as something that is cited in discourse, not always through explicit mentioning, but referenced to position oneself.[35] As we will see later, competence in and across languages is at the hallmark of metapragmatic activity that L2 users of Japanese experience in Japan. While it prominently surfaces in their reflections about potential and limitation in using Japanese (Grosser 2023b), the picture is more complex when looking at it from a *repertoire perspective* (Section 3.5.2). With the last focal concept that I introduce in this chapter, I tie lived experience, stance, and metapragmatics together to consider how speakers in Japan perceive their *competence* in and across languages. For this purpose, I revisit the classic notion of *communicative competence*, as put forward by Hymes (1967) in his critique of Chomsky's (1965) linguistic competence. I then address more recent developments, until I present my own reformulation of this concept that emerges out of the findings from the empirical chapters. For a critical reformulation of communicative competence—and the reasons why I keep this expression even though many alternative proposals are circulating,—I combine it with the *repertoire* concept and embed it in a metapragmatic and intersubjective framework.

I favor communicative competence over concepts like *language proficiency* or *language skills*, forming alignment with a linguistic-anthropological take on communicative competence that I introduce in Section 3.5.4. More general expressions include *knowledge*, *ability*, or *capability*, preceded by *communicative* or *language/linguistic*, which are used to describe potential and limitation in language use in some way.

[35] See Bauman & Briggs (1990) on the concepts of *entextualization*, that is the making of discursive segments into detachable text that can be *decontextualized* (lifted out of a context) and then *recontextualized* or pasted into in a new discursive event.

3.5.1 Conceptual trajectories

Researchers focusing on language use in society have challenged the notion of an idealized speaker and their presumed competence to communicate effectively and appropriately across diverse contexts. The development of communicative competence emerged in the *ethnography of communication* (Gumperz & Hymes 1986 [1972]).

Two central facets of communicative competence include "(tacit) *knowledge* and (ability for) *use*" (Hymes 1972: 64, emphasis in original). Hymes (1972: 63, emphasis in original) decomposes communicative competence into four components, distinguishing "[w]hether (and to what degree) something is formally *possible* […]; *feasible* […]; *appropriate* […]; [and] actually *performed*." Knowledge and ability for use are merged and construed against norms that regulate the composition and reception of utterances. This view on competence is also endorsed in Gumperz' (1984: 280) definition of communicative competence as "[t]he knowledge of discourse processing conventions and related communicative norms that participants must control as a precondition to being able to enlist and sustain conversational cooperation."

Interest in practical application comes from research on *language learning*, here used in a very broad sense, often in critical engagement with the original formulation by Hymes. Researchers then adjusted ideas about competence to apply it to language teaching, learning, and interculturality (for an overview with a focus on developments in research on second language acquisition, see Kanwit & Solon 2023). They highlighted interactional, discourse, sociolinguistic, sociocultural, or intercultural dimensions of a learner's competence (for example, Byram 1997; Canale & Swain 1980). Canale & Swain (1980: 29–31) disaggregate communicative competence into three components in their influential conceptualization:

(1) *Grammatical competence* involves understanding and applying rules of phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics.
(2) *Sociolinguistic competence* encompasses knowledge of cultural norms, discourse rules, and the ability to use language appropriately in various social contexts.
(3) *Strategic competence* refers to the use of verbal and non-verbal strategies to overcome communication challenges and ensure effective interaction.

In a similar vein, Firth & Wagner (2007 [1997]: 768) conceptualize communicative competence as a social and contextual phenomenon, emphasizing its acquisition and use through interaction rather than solely as an individual cognitive ability. A focus on

interaction had been already emphasized by Kramsch (1986). She proposed the concept of *interactional competence* that is now used by researchers working in the paradigm of conversation analysis (see Greer et al. 2017; Taguchi 2015 for applications to L2-Japanese contexts). This shift foregrounds the interactionally co-constructed nature of competence, departing from a cognitive view on competence that claims it to be situated in a community and within the individual (Pekarek Doehler 2019). [36] While this move relocates the locus of competence, it does not explain why and how interactants reflect on their competence across their repertoire, or how such perceptions influence their communicative practices. I propose incorporating embodied and experiential components into our understanding of competence.

3.5.2 Resources and repertoires

To tackle the problems that concepts of communicative competence pose in understanding speakers' lived experiences, I first turn to the Gumperz' original formulation of the *verbal repertoire* that he defines as "the totality of linguistic forms regularly employed in the course of socially significant interaction" (1964: 137). These linguistic forms are better conceptualized as *resources* to signal that they gain relevance as speakers use them to perform a specific function in discourse. I have already introduced some resources as means to take a stance that are relevant for the empirical investigation in Section 3.3.3. However, it is important not to confuse resources with languages, as resources go beyond named languages, as well as they can be situated within the range of a specific language. Semiotically speaking, anything can become a resource once a social actor composes, controls, and manipulates a sign in context to achieve an effect (see, for example, Canagarajah 2017: 66–67). Speakers use resources that go beyond speech or utterances and attune them with other semiotic forms that organize how bodies and material objects can be arranged in space (Goodwin 2018; Kimura & Canagarajah 2020). [37] The pool from which resources enter individual repertoires

[36] There are more modifiers of competence in research on language and interaction. See, for example, *pragmatic competence* (Taguchi 2009), *global competence* (Doerr 2020), or *structural competence* (Doerr 2022).

[37] My focal resources for this thesis are admittedly narrowed down to mainly *linguistic* features. For a broader sociologically critical reflection on resources, see, for example, Bourdieu (1991) or Rosa (2016: 44–52).

can be called a *reservoir* that comprises "the total of sets and its potential of the community as a whole" (Bernstein 1999: 159).

I regard resources not exclusively as instrumental. I do not deny the instrumental quality of any linguistic resource that speakers recruit with the goal of accomplishing social action. A resource, however, should not only be viewed as a teleological concept, but as an emotional experience. To explain this further, I connect it to Busch's reformulation the *repertoire* concept.

In critical engagement with the verbal repertoire, Busch (2012b) advocates for a reconceptualization toward a *linguistic* or *communicative repertoire* that should be understood as an embodied ensemble of resources (see also Rymes 2020). She sees "the body as an interface where the biographical and the discursive intersect" (Busch 2016: 5). Look again at Rebecca's language portrait (Figure 2 in Section 3.2). Besides Japanese, she draws English, Mandarin, Italian, and Dharug on her body silhouette. English is the language she grew up speaking with her family and friends. She studied some Mandarin Chinese. Italian is a language she is interested in because of her ancestors who moved from Italy to Australia. Dharug is an Australian Aboriginal language that she does not speak but recognizes as traditionally spoken in the Sydney region where she grew up. That is why she locates it at her feet, resembling the soil she walks on. This is one example in which the repertoire can capture languages that one is not "competent" in a traditional sense, but toward which one takes a stance and feels affiliated with (Rampton 1990). Researchers such as Goodwin (2004) and Canagarajah (2022) have shown how speakers exhibit competence to communicate with others with limited resources. They emphasize that language users can overcome physical limitations and disabilities to a certain extent by mobilizing others through interaction and material or technological resources to establish meaning.

The repertoire carries inscriptions of spatiotemporal and biographic pathways and emotional associations (Busch 2021), while emphasizing its fluid and dynamic development throughout an individual's lifetime (see also Wortham 2005: 99 on *timescales* of socialization). A repertoire approach also attempts to overcome received distinctions of language competences into "native," "non-native," "second language," etc. I will return to these concepts in the next section (3.5.3).

An inherent component of the repertoire is stance, as individuals take stance toward and with resources. Therefore, the repertoire mirrors moments of evaluation, positioning, and variant alignment. These metapragmatic stances accrete to habitual experiences and call for

response and rationalization within the individual. The repertoire is thus an outcome of an individual's uptake of ideological work they encounter throughout life.

> Moments of lived experience of language inscribe themselves into the linguistic memory, they become, as I will show in the following sections […], part of the linguistic repertoire, either because they represent a special event with a strong emotional impact […] or because they occur repeatedly. (Busch 2017: 434)

The linguistic memory carries traces of emotional impact. Through iteration or citational chains of metapragmatic stances, the resources undergo valorization that is not only confined to an interactional level, but situated in societal frameworks that regiment valorizations of language (Bourdieu 1991; Hassemer & Garrido 2020). I will explore this reflexive dimension within the repertoire in Section 5.4 further. Before, I insert an excursion on concepts of the L2 (Japanese) self, as perceptions of competence feed into the subjectivation process of the experiences that individuals have when becoming a speaker of a language.

3.5.3 Multilingual subjects, L2 Japanese, and speaker legitimacy

Even though *a language* is just one of the many resources an individual integrates into their repertoire over lifetime, acquiring a new language (with *language* understood here as a sociohistorical construct that emerges from patterned use and ideological work) points to a time-consuming investment and creation of its perceived resourcefulness. I use *language learning* here to point to the socially mediated assembly and orchestration of resources, the "tactics, technologies and mechanisms by means of which specific language resources become part of someone's repertoire" (Blommaert & Backus 2013: 14). I focus on the social aspect, as these resources become part of an individual's repertoire in the process of *language socialization* (Ochs & Schieffelin 2012), rather than investigating the psychological and neurological processes that underlie the *acquisition* of a new linguistic system.

Encountering and learning a new language is an experience. This is why it led researchers to foreground the importance of experience when looking at how learners create a sense of self with their language learning in a new environment (Kramsch 2009; Piller et al. 2024). Here, lived experience and metapragmatic stances toward competence gradually flow together.

> One could say that desire in language is the perceptual disturbance and realignment experienced by the language user, whose identity is constitutive of and constituted by the foreign symbolic system itself. (Kramsch 2009: 16)

Desire entails a learner's imagination and creation of an identity as user of the target language. Recall Katharina (Extract 3.3), who imagines herself as a competent user of *keigo* at her future Japanese workplace while still living in Austria. Language learners are, at the same time, always multilingual. For my interlocutors, Japanese is one language in their repertoire among others, and among communicative strategies that transgress linguistic boundaries. I follow Kramsch (2009: 17) and see individuals who use more than one language on a daily basis as *multilingual subjects*, though this is the case for most people (Busch 2012a; Derrida 1996).

Language learning often requires investment. In this section, I use *investment* differently from its meaning in stancetaking (see, for example, Section 3.3.1). It refers to a learner's allocation of resources shaped by the intersections of capital, identity, and ideology (Darvin & Norton 2015). Research in this respect often focuses on how a learner's perception of returns in their investment in language learning develops within a socio-economic structure in which languages undergo differentiated attributions with respect to their resourcefulness. This is particularly problematic when looking at how language competences have implications for employability (Flubacher et al. 2018). Japan shows ambivalent responses to Japanese language requirements and needs of migrants (Länsisalmi 2025; see also the overview in Chapter 2). Language competences are seen as a commodity among other bundles of skills that neoliberal environments require (Kubota & Takeda 2021; see also Urciuoli 2003, 2008). Speakers fashion themselves with and through conscious investments in language learning, for example, in order to improve their standing in the job market (Martín Rojo 2019). In Katharina's example, correct *keigo* is seen as essential part of Japanese competence at the workplace. Against this background, we see that repertoires and associated competences across the ensemble of resources within the repertoire are shaped by ideologies. I will further explore this aspect of competence in the empirical chapters.

One pervasive ideology that, in my view, comes into being because of a distorted concept of competence is that of the so-called *native speaker*. [38] The native speaker is a persona equipped with elaborate competence in their *native language*, serving as the yardstick toward

[38] For details on the discussion and critique of the native speaker concept in the field of second language acquisition and teaching studies, see, for example, Cook (1999), Doerr (2009b), Slavkov et al. (2022).

which competence for L2 speakers is measured. It is a model of linguistic authority and mobilized to construct stances of alterity that operate via all three pairs of tactics of intersubjectivity (introduced in 3.3.4). A long-standing concern in sociolinguistics is to criticize this concept and reveal how it contributes to subjectivizing and categorizing speakers. Rampton (1990) deconstructs the native speaker concept into more relational concepts of *expertise* that forms in socialization and stays partial (see also Carr 2010: 19–21), and *inheritance* and *affiliation*. Affiliation can be seen as a person's stance that exhibits their sense of belonging and identification with languages. Inheriting a language by simply being socialized with it from birth does not automatically yield a "competent speaker."

In a similar move, Doerr (2009a) proposes to shift our attention away from discussing the native speaker, toward investigating how this specific ideology manifests in discourse. She maintains that we need to investigate its discursive effects, as these effects lead to categorizing and illegitimizing speakers. I presented an outline of the status of L2 Japanese in the literature review (Chapter 2) of this thesis. In the Japanese context, speakerhood of a language is closely tied to perceived or ascribed identity. Speakerhood of Japanese has already been ideologically constructed during modernity, as outlined in Section 2.4. Monolingual bias and exclusionary stances toward L2 Japanese amplify the assumption that non-Japanese individuals cannot master the language (see Miller 1977; Ohta 1993 for a discussion). Takeuchi (2020a, 2023a, 2023b, 2025) highlights the issue of *speaker legitimacy* of L2 users of Japanese. Her findings suggest that L2 users of Japanese often face moments of non-recognition, as they are not accepted as legitimate speakers. These experiences include being excused from using *keigo* (as Katharina in Extract 3.3 tells us), using dialectal features, or more general evaluations of one's competence in Japanese (Takeuchi 2020b, 2023b). Also refusal of being spoken to in Japanese in interactions with native speakers of Japanese, for example, through code-switching to English, is an evidence of deprivation of Japanese speaker legitimacy (Takeuchi 2023a, 2025). L2 users of Japanese are often just not expected to be able to use Japanese. All these experiences index stances of alterity that L2 users of Japanese present and, in consequence, co-construct. Competence and attacks on speaker legitimacy are also related to speculations about intentions. These are assumptions and expectations about who is allowed to use what kind of language and in what ways. The Japanese context is insightful here, as Japanese is still ideologically reserved for "ethnically" Japanese people (Oguma 1995).

3.5.4 Toward a metapragmatics of communicative competence

Research on language ideologies has somewhat neglected the co-constructed nature of competence and individual perceptions of competence. Especially when interacting in a learnt language, potential and limitation of using this language quickly become an object of linguistic self-reflection (Kramsch 2009). This dimension of reflexivity toward language competence is a product of interaction. Interaction here comprises, on the one hand, intersubjective interaction between individuals who exchange utterances, for example, between L1 and L2 users. It is also, on the other hand, an L2 user's interaction with—and the uptake of—the social conditions that regiment norms of socialization, most prominently figuring in institutional and professional requirements that migrants must meet.

Since its initial proposal the concept of communicative competence, i.e., *competence in and across languages,* has undergone a reformulation. This thesis refines communicative competence by centering reflexivity and intersubjectivity. In Hymes' early discussions on communicative competence, evaluation was already part of the concept, as he explains that "competence, moreover, is integral with attitudes, values, and motivations concerning language, its features and uses, and integral with competence for, and attitudes toward, the interrelation of language with the other codes of communicative conduct" (1972: 60). I will show in the empirical part that this integrity can be enriched by looking at communicative competence as constituted by acts of metapragmatic stancetaking. These acts, I claim, are "modes of experiencing the world" (Ochs 2012: 142). Ethnographic works have already pointed toward this direction to rethink the nature of communicative competence by situating it alongside scales of interaction and ideologies that are calibrated in and across moments, events, and discourses.

> It is at once the product of moment-by-moment negotiations within the act of communication and large-scale social structures, historical dynamics, and the actions and ideologies of institutions like the state. It is as intersubjectively achieved as it is the potential of subject contestation and conflict. It invokes dynamics of authenticity, plurality, and mobility, and links people's ability to communicate with others with their moral valuation, rights to citizenship and belonging, and position in the hierarchies and structure of inequality, both local and non-local. These complex webs of entanglement create structure of inclusion and exclusion that may be at once material and ideological. (Kataoka et al. 2013: 349)

I subscribe to Kataoka et al.'s proposal for a redefinition of communicative competence. I retain communicative competence (and henceforth sometimes abbreviate it as *competence* for

the sake of convenience) to make its intellectual pathway transparent. What is more, I suggest calling speaking subjects' stancetaking practices toward issues of competence in and across languages—in other words, their *perceptions* of communicative competence—the *metapragmatics of competence*. This understanding reflects my take on competence as

(1) emergent in interaction,
(2) constructed through intersubjectivity,
(3) a consequence of reflexivity,
(4) and regimented by ideologies.

Competence can be conceptually broken down into four interrelated dimensions: interaction, intersubjectivity, reflexivity, and ideology. This dismantling is based on previous research on reflexive and ideological implications for a subject's understanding of their competences with languages. Competence is partially grounded in speaker's awareness and deciphering of signs in contexts (Goebel 2013; Makihara 2013). For example, Park (2010), focusing on the status of English in South Korean media, examined how competence in English becomes linked to legitimacy and identity via naturalization. He claims that this "naturalized link between competence and legitimacy makes competence an extremely effective resource for the reproduction of social distinctions" (Park 2010: 24). While competence is constituted through resources located within a repertoire, it can become in turn a resource itself. Competence as ideological construct thus fertilizes the ground from which speakers build stances of alterity in interaction.[39] To define competence merely as *ability to do* thus obscures that "*competence is about being positioned, not about general or open-ended potential*" (Blommaert et al. 2005: 211, emphasis in original). A subject allegedly lacking the ability to draw on a specific set of resources in their repertoire is contingent upon hierarchization and evaluative enregisterment. In a similar vein, judgements of language proficiency are mobilized "to draw borders of belonging, legitimacy, and power to include the 'proficient ones' and to exclude the others" (Boitel 2021: 67). Internalized perceptions of competence influence ongoing attunement of communicative practices in interaction (Martin-Beltrán 2010). Competences are thus seen as *truncated*, since multilingual and register-specific repertoires are regimented in society (Blommaert et al. 2005: 197; Blommaert & Backus 2013).

[39] Piller (2002: 104–120) provides an overview of some *ideologies of proficiency* of German-English bilingual couples. Apart from grammatical proficiency, her participants talked about fluency, accent, success, and failures of their engagement with their partner's language.

Rydell (2018) shows that migrants view their competence always in relation to others, their reflection on competence is influenced by what they think how others assess and evaluate them. Competence, therefore, is not only interactionally distributed through participants' scaffolding of expressibility and understanding, but also intersubjectively, as it is not residing in an individual's mind, but distributed across minds. It forms through ascriptions of intentionality ("what do the others think about my Japanese, my English, etc.?").

My formulation of a metapragmatics of competence also includes a *metapragmatic competence* (Kim 2022: 229). I understand this competence as the degree to which subjects in interaction can thematize and characterize features of language and these degrees of awareness are constrained by ideologies (Silverstein 1979, 2001; Zuckerman & Enfield 2023). As Jaffe (2013: 451, emphasis in original) tells us, "communicative competence encompasses not only knowledge of how to do things with words, but also includes the ability to participate in discourses *about* language" . In this sense, this thesis is equally a discourse about language. I argue that participation in such discourses can best be understood by attending to participants' construals of lived experiences in which issues of competence are negotiated, calibrated, and contested. To understand how competence is experienced, I attend to *what* they say about it and *how* they say it.

3.6 Conclusion: Looping together

With competence, I complete a reflexive loop that ties it together with the lived experience of language, stance, and metapragmatics (Figure 4).[40] I devise this loop to be *reflexive*, as every concept refers back to another in the interpretative process that creates a loop. Manifestations of one concept are understood with reference to another (and so on). Competence can be understood when looking at how individuals take stance and how they attribute them to others, for example, through voicing. This tells us about how competence perceptions and entitlements are distributed. Competence is also connected to emotions, via experiences that speakers make in interaction.

[40] A first sketch of this figure was created with the AI tool *Perplexity* (https://www.perplexity.ai/) and subsequently slightly amended by me.

A reflexive loop illustrates my interlocutors' perceptions of competence. Reflecting on potential, limitation, and differences across the linguistic repertoire refers back to metapragmatic calibration that refers back to a construction of stance toward pragmatic phenomena that, finally, refers back to how an individual experiences interaction. The lived experiences then refer back to competence as expression of how speaking subjects access and make sense of their world. The reflexive loop is not confined to the individual, but shows that reflexivity can only emerge when looking at how subjects attend to and make sense of each others' actions (Enfield & Kockelman 2017).

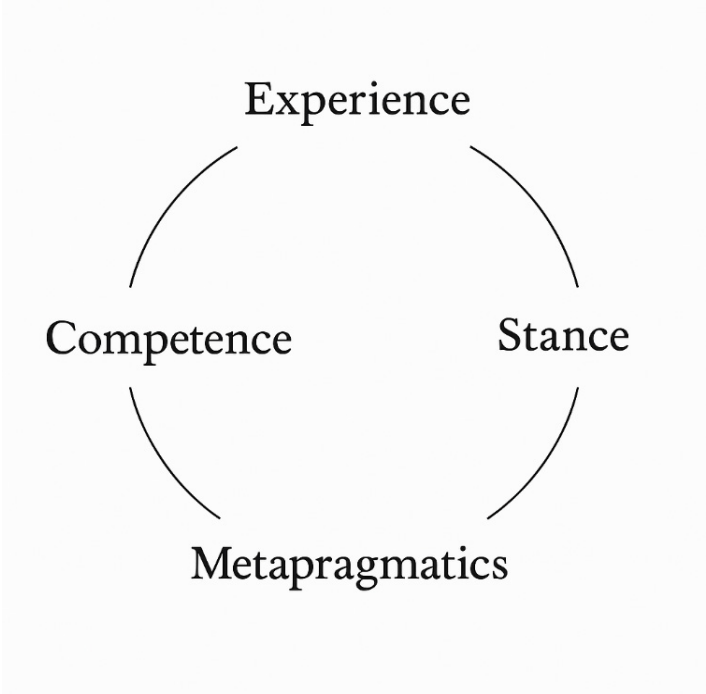


Figure 4. The reflexive loop

4 Methods and Methodology

4.1 Field (and) relations

In this chapter, I present my methods and reflections on methodology. I introduce my approach to fieldwork. Fieldwork is the framework for data collection that places *speaking subjects* and their practices at the center of investigation (Sections 4.1.1 and 4.1.2). I address the encounters I made in the field (Section 4.1.3). Then, I map out some of the *pathways*—non-linear trajectories of research—that illustrate the research process (4.1.4). I move on to introduce how I engaged with the participants in my study (Section 4.1.5). I conclude with ethical considerations (Section 4.1.6).

In Section 4.2, I describe the data collection in detail. I will give an overview of the collection procedure (Section 4.2.1) and the material that I collected. Then, I describe the methods in detail and add methodological reflections. After introducing audio recordings (4.2.3), I dedicate a substantial amount of space to my methodological reflection on interviewing (Section 4.2.4 and Subsections therein), as I experimented with various types of interviews. They constitute a central part of the final analysis. I follow up with observation (4.2.5) that I sparingly made use of. I introduce and reflect on my fieldwork diary (Section 4.2.6). One section is devoted to questions of *text* and asks how spoken language can be entextualized and represented in and with a transcript (4.2.7).

In the last section, I will explain the analytical procedures, including coding (4.3.1) and the conceptual tools of analysis, i.e., the methods to understand subjective and intersubjective experiences of competence. Here, I address *stance and context* (4.3.2), the conversational architecture of *order and sequence* (4.3.3), and, finally, the concepts of *action ascription* and methodological *reflexivity* to explain how they contribute to calibrating the analytical lens (4.3.4).

4.1.1 An ethnographic and speaker-centered approach

Ethnography seeks to understand social actions in a specific context, as I introduced in the Introduction (1.5). It is an attempt to make sense of individuals' lives and to understand which practices and experiences guide their actions. Understanding oscillates between making the strange or unknown familiar, and estranging oneself from the familiar and commonly held assumptions about such practices (Agar 1996). Familiarizing oneself is an orientation toward the other that points to *alterity* (see also Theory Chapter Section 3.3.4), which is a condition for understanding oneself, also as a researcher or fieldworker (Creese 2025).

In this project, I aim to give a *thick description* (Geertz 1973) of how my interlocutors narrate their experiences of competence in and across languages in Japan in different contexts. While not conceptualized as an ethnography in the strict sense, I draw on ethnographic approaches to *communicative practices* (e.g., Hanks 1996), and combine these approaches with *biographical methods in multilingualism research* (Busch 2012b, 2013, 2017) to understand lived experiences of language. As Flubacher (2022) has pointed out, both approaches can be fruitfully combined when placing speakers and their practices at the center of investigation. The ethnographic perspective figures most prominently in my firm grounding of data collection in fieldwork and my attention to L2 users' own interpretations of their situated practices. I also adopt this perspective in my reflections on research, where I outline the trajectory of my approaches and my own position(ing) in the field. I explore these as part of researcher's reflexivity in the next sections (and see also Grosser 2024b for more reflections on my field experiences). In so doing, I make transparent the choices I made in terms of methods and rationale for amending, abandoning, and implementing methods during the research process.

The speaker-centered, biographical perspective seeks to understand my interlocutors' lived experiences of language and their interactional pathways in Japan. Centering the speaker takes the subject as a locus of embodied and emotional experiences (Busch 2013; see also Section 3.2.2). Subjective experiences allow for understanding social practices and processes on different scales.

From an analytical perspective, I enrich the ethnographic and speaker-centered approach with tools from interactional sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, conversation analysis, and pragmatics (see Section 4.3).

4.1.2 Entering the field

The purpose of this project is to understand how L2 users of Japanese experience language *in* Japan. *The field*, albeit broad, is therefore set in the country of Japan. In this initial understanding, the field is a *delineation of space* in the physical sense, in contrast to Bourdieu's concept of field as a *social space* and arena for positioning and power relations (see, for example, Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). This latter sense of field certainly comes into play when considering the development of my project. Such a distinction of the field has been criticized in anthropology, as it often leads to favoring certain fields and deeming them more appropriate to anthropological inquiry (Gupta & Ferguson 1997). In this section, I first draw attention to the physical-spatial and temporal aspects of the field, before I explore its social constituents. What I want to show here is the problematization of the notion of field in my work. *Field* points to a distinction between fieldwork at different field sites in Japan, and the work at a desk (in Japan, Austria, or elsewhere) to make sense of the data after collection. However, as Fabian (2001: 11–32) cautions, knowledge in ethnographic or anthropological projects emerges in situated interactions in presence and in exchanges with other individuals. The distinction between fieldwork and analytical work collapses in the same way as the perceived boundaries of private and professional selves of the researcher (see also Bourdieu 2003). As fieldwork in the traditional sense requires the fieldworker to physically move to a site to carry out their work, professional and private spheres merge and potentially require a redrawing of boundaries. This redrawing bears potential for tensions, which I will address further here.

In my project, a local restriction to Japan unexpectedly bore two caveats. First, it made it difficult for me to deal with social circumstances that would hinder me from accessing the physical field. While being mainly based in Vienna during my doctoral studies, an integral part of the project was a one-year fieldwork stay in Tokyo to collect data. However, as one measure to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, Japan stopped issuing new visas and closed its borders for people without Japanese citizenship in 2020. I was unable to enter the country as planned, encounter participants, and carry out my research. This was the first challenge that made me rethink my original design of the project and my idea about the field, in particular. Moments of such tension that force the fieldworker to change plans are a fundamental experience in human interaction and the research process (Blommaert & Dong 2020). Moments of tension testify to a co-dependence of field relations and *precariousness*

that is inherent in empirical, ethnographic research (Hassemer & Flubacher 2020). While it at times feels like it places the researcher in the position of having to ask for favors, as someone who relies on other's willingness and cooperation to conduct research, tensions also become a resource for understanding. In Grosser (2024b), I reflect on the personal and academic challenges faced by researchers who need to move to conduct fieldwork in another country. Through unforeseen circumstances brought about by border control, it felt like the *transitional* or *liminal* dimension of my position as a researcher was magnified. The transition from one space to another was temporarily put on hold, resulting in what felt like a stretched-out liminality (see Hassemer & Flubacher 2020; Jacobs & Slembrouck 2010 on the concept of *liminal ethnography*).

To tackle this challenge, I had to rethink what constitutes the field in the context of my research. I came to understand the field as a *zone of encounters* (Faier 2009 and see next section on *encounter* as a concept). These zones are inhabited by speakers and brought to life by their practices but are not confined to physical spaces.[41] In this sense, I reconsider the field as a space—not only in a material sense—of encounters that does not necessarily lie within national borders. Shifting my attention to encounters, I reconfigure the notion and my expectations toward what counts as a proper field.

The second aspect that made me rethink and revise my original research design concerning the field is the lived reality of my interlocutors. While I could eventually conduct the actual data collection in Japan, the international individuals that I present in this study have ties to countries other than Japan. What is more, the contact that I established and that I am keeping with these individuals spans various places and time zones. In some cases, it came into being outside the field in the sense I imagined it at the outset of the project. Such a mobile experience is characteristic of people with *transnational identities* (De Fina & Perrino 2013), i.e., migrants with high mobility who move across nations for study, work, and love. I realized that when investigating people on the move, I need to consider their trajectories of movement across different sites (as has been claimed for a long time in ethnography, e.g., Marcus 1995). I will turn to sites and social relations in the field in the next section.

[41] I am aware that there are more layers to the notion of *space*, as it can encompass physical space, as well as *imagined* or *ideological* space that constraint what people can or can not do within their *lived* space. I thank Patrick Heinrich for drawing my attention to this further distinction.

4.1.3 Encounter, contact, rapport

When adopting a speaker-centered approach to investigating lived experiences of communicative competence, the outset of the research process starts with *encountering* the other, someone or something unfamiliar that sparks desire to explore and understand. This encounter grows into a mutual orientation toward each other (Goffman 1961).[42] Encounters may not follow a straightforward spatiotemporal order. In my project, many encounters occurred before I started the phase of data collection. For example, after arriving in Tokyo for fieldwork in April 2022, I approached individuals through my already existing social network in Japan. Through further introductions, I encountered other individuals and couples, and I asked them to participate in my project. I could therefore draw on the connections that I had already established since I first came to Japan to study. *Contact*, in Goebel's (2019a: 332) sense, holds "that all social life is characterised by contact with those who are not exact copies of ourselves with exactly the same communicative repertoires." Contact, thus, involves orientation toward others and acknowledgment of divergent repertoires and trajectories. Acknowledgment and acceptance lay out the foundation for greater intensity of social relations. A relation involving at least some degree of trust is the condition for individuals to participate in a research project. Therefore, when I approached the becoming participants for my project, I had already formed a degree of *rapport* with them (Goebel 2019b, 2021). Mutual trust and transparency in distributing entitlements and responsibilities creates a field of relations that grows into a network of relationships between me and my participants. This is mirrored by the shift from a spatiotemporal field toward a field of interactions that is created through encounters and networks that grow in branching and complexity. For example, while being based in Tokyo, I reached out to friends and acquaintances in other cities around Japan, such as Sendai and Osaka, and found it valuable to travel to different field sites. The project can thus be viewed as a *multi-sited ethnography* (Marcus 1995), spanning several places in Japan.

Contact and relations evolved in unexpected ways. The focal participants in this study became focal by *contingence*, that is the "the contingent, improvisational, and transformative ways that the convergence of people's paths in space and time brings different stakes and

[42] Note, however, that there are also *semiotic* or *communicative* encounters that are characterized "by participants' mutual orientation to signs or messages" (Agha 2007a: 69) that are linked to a chain of prior events.

desires into relational everyday practice" (Faier 2009: 10). For example, I was acquainted with some of the participants before the designated fieldwork period, through study abroad periods that we spent together in Japan, or mutual connections in Austria. Yet these contacts emerged as focal during the process of fieldwork. Encountering people on the path of fieldwork is transformative in the sense that such developments of relations and their transformative nature happen *unpredictably* (Rosa 2016: 278). This means that developments of relations contain elements of elusiveness and uncontrollability. I suggest that the pathway of connections and relations in and beyond the field is paved with unpredictable events. For example, the project is dependent on people offering me an insight into their lives. This dependence from our first encounter, over growing contact, rapport, and eventually their cooperation for this project builds a pathway of connection and relation. I will connect pathways of social connection with spatiotemporal pathways in the next section.

However, a close relationship also bears potential for ethical tensions (Kubanyiova 2008: 512). I noticed that people I know well were more inclined to participate in the project. What is more, my interpretation may be influenced by my prior engagement with these individuals. The analysis thus includes traces of data that were consensually not collected as such but derived from my prior interactions with and my knowledge about the participants. This is because I am part of the field and act according to my ideological assumptions of how a field is constituted. I will come back to questions of ethics in Section 4.1.6.

4.1.4 Pathways in/as fieldwork

I undertook three fieldwork trips to Japan. One year from April 2022 to April 2023. One month in April 2024, and three months from February 2025 to April 2025. While I initially planned the first year to be sufficient for collecting data and progressing the project, I realized that I could refine my approach after distancing myself from the field, including spatial movement. Rampton describes such iterations of establishing rapport with interlocutors in the field and detaching oneself from the field sites as circles that a becoming researcher goes through.

> Within this, rapport can maybe stand as a shorthand for the work involved in getting closer to the people and situations you want to understand, while sociolinguistics and discourse analysis provide ways of denaturalizing the routine flow of everyday practice, uncovering all the interactional, cultural, and ideological processes that are usually taken for granted. Within the

> time-frame of a Ph.D., one could say that this interplay between rapport and sociolinguistics informs the development of students as researchers, as they progress from optimistic early efforts at fieldwork interviewing and participation, to a reflexivity afterwards that is grounded in detailed empirical analysis of how they themselves have actively shaped what they've been told. (Rampton 2021: 51–53)

With spatiotemporal distance, I could improve, for example, my interviewing skills (Briggs 1986)—or what I perceive as a good interview in retrospect, based on my assumptions about what an interview should be like. Through distance and retrospection, I also explored further interviewing methods, such as story prompts (Section 4.2.4). During my second and third stays, I abandoned some methods and tried out others. The reason for this is that my research interest evolved over the first long fieldwork period, moving from an interactional to a speaker-centered perspective. I have been repeatedly moving between fieldwork and my base in Vienna to examine my data, which allowed for a reflection on social relations and my approach to fieldwork and data collection.

I maintained contact with the individuals who became involved in my project during the periods when I was not in Japan. I used a fieldwork diary to keep and to refresh my memories of interactions and encounters in Japan (see Section 4.2.6). At the same time, it became a tool for reflecting on my methodical approach to the project and data collection. And it also captures my own lived experiences of language.

I use Wortham & Reyes' (2021) notion of *pathway* to describe temporal and spatial—unpredictable or contingent—trajectories and movements of events, moments, and people. Pathways can be traced *in* my research when I analyze my participants' metapragmatic positionings over a period of their time in Japan. At the same time, pathways constitute the very *essence* of fieldwork, as they leave traces of unfolding events while being in the field. This chapter describes pathways in the latter sense, while the empirical chapters do so in the former sense.

4.1.5 Participation and listening

This investigation seeks to understand the lived experiences of non-Japanese individuals who reside in Japan at the time of my study. All of them grew up speaking different languages and got interested in Japan and Japanese in adolescence. They also started learning Japanese at this age.

Most of the people I worked with and interviewed in the project have either a European or Asian background. This mirrors my social network of migrants in Japan. In the examples I analyze in the following chapters, I focus on L2 users of Japanese, even though I have also worked with many Japanese nationals, or L1 users of Japanese. I have reached out to many individuals over the course of the project and formed a relationship with them to varying degrees. The space in this thesis allows for a closer examination of the lived experiences of only a few of these individuals.

Some of the people I interviewed are in a relationship with a Japanese national. I collected several hours of audio recordings of couple talk and conducted interviews with them. Investigating the language use of romantic partners was not something I planned in my initial design, but rather an opportunity that arose through encounters before and during fieldwork. In the case of Katharina, who I will introduce in the empirical part (Chapter 5, also see Extract 3.3), she offered me to participate in my project when we were both in Austria. I took the opportunity and, unexpectedly, it yielded data I would ponder over for weeks. I thus decided to interview her and her partner a few times during two fieldwork stays. Even though international couples are not the only vantage point of analyzing perceptions of competence in this thesis, engaging with their life made me reflect on my position as someone gaining insight into a relationship. I aimed to understand their experiences without being overly nosy, respecting their privacy and boundaries (see also the next section on ethics).

To understand the experiences of individuals, one needs to *listen* to them. I listened to their stories, interacted with them, and asked them questions. Listening, however, is not only a process in which the researcher receives information from interlocutors in the field. Listening is embedded in a more complex net of power relations, since "[t]he practice of hearing and seeing, and the subject positions of listener and observer, is as socially constructed and historically emergent as are other corporeal sites and practices of subject formation" (Inoue 2003: 157). The one who listens has the ultimate power in selecting, framing, and presenting what individuals in the field have told them. It is part of an ongoing interactional construction in which individuals are made into subjects through processes of citing and voicing (see also Inoue 2006). In this sense, I was enacting "the persona of the researcher who listens to the speaking subject, takes note of their (biographical) accounts and encourages a description of their language biographies and repertoires" (Flubacher & Purkarthofer 2022: 13). Hearing and listening are the first steps of entextualization and further recontextualization when the researcher transcribes these voices and then

transforms them into academic work (see Section 4.2.7). Listening, therefore, involves an ethical dimension, to which I turn next.

4.1.6 Ethics and institutions

Research on humans, as explained above, inevitably positions the researcher as the listening subject that frames the accounts of experiences that my interlocutors share with me. This involves a responsibility for the other (Lévinas 2003), as precarious structures in the neoliberal university environment obfuscate the vulnerability of subject positions, of research participants as well as researchers (Creese 2025). Above I already introduced liminality as a condition and act of balancing and navigating circumstances in which I experienced diminished agency. Though I deem chances for my participants to be harmed as low in my project, I strictly followed the procedures for informed consent. I bear responsibility for keeping anonymity of my participants (if they wish so) and pseudonymize their names and do not include information that makes them readily identifiable by others. Especially when working with couples, I sometimes felt that my research steps into areas of the private that need delicate navigation. However, such careful navigation is required when working with any individual in and beyond the field.

Aligning with the common practice in research on or with humans, I provided information and sought *consent* from the people who participated in my project. I prepared a sheet with an explanation of my project and request for all types of data (conversational recordings and/or different types of interviews), along with a consent form (see Appendix Section B). Such consent forms require the participants to sign, which can be seen as an *entextualized form of consent*, often required by institutions (see e.g., Copland 2020: 187). However, I do not regard consent as ultimately fixed in this way. Instead, consent needs to be renegotiated and may even shift throughout the project (see Beiler & Dewilde 2025 for examples). Therefore, I reached out to participants and asked them again for consent to publish the outcomes of my analysis in academic papers. I anonymized data and pseudonymized the participants to ensure confidentiality. I asked some of the participants to choose a pseudonym by themselves. In other cases, I randomly assigned names to them.

I faced challenges in balancing confidentiality and seeking help in interpreting and discussing the data with other students at my home institution in Austria or institutions I visited in Japan. I found myself in situations where I felt I carefully needed to balance

clarifying aspects of the respective participant's background to make sense of the data on the one hand, and ensuring their privacy and anonymity, on the other. For such situations, Guillemin & Gillam (2004) propose a *microethical* approach that draws on the researcher's reflexivity in navigating such moments. Reflexivity here involves iterative thinking about ethical issues within and after interactions with the participants. I will further discuss reflexivity as a method of analysis in Section 4.3.4.

Ethnographic and anthropological research faces challenges in terms of ethics that official guidelines may not adequately cover when researching transnationally (see, for example, Robertson's 2009 edited volume). Because I was affiliated with an Austrian and a Japanese institution during fieldwork, I had to observe regulations at both institutions. For example, this included a substantial amount of paperwork in which I had to outline the exact schedule and research procedure for field trips within Japan. Particularly in ethnographic contexts, giving an exact description of what to expect beforehand is at times challenging.

I rewarded my participants after interviews with gift cards, sweet treats from Austria, or invitations to lunch or dinner. I regard this as an acknowledgment for their time and commitment, rather than an incentive to participate in the research in the first place. The costs for the gift cards were covered by the *Japan Society for the Promotion of Sciences* during my fellowship (April 2022–April 2023). The office of the *Graduate School of International Culture and Communication Studies* at Waseda University, the institution I was affiliated with during my fieldwork, administered the funds according to the university regulations.

4.2 Data

In the following sections, I describe the different types of data I collected.

4.2.1 Data collection procedure

I approached the individuals with a brief explanation of my project. I used different channels, from e-mail to spoken explanations, to reach out to them. Before and during the first half of my one-year fieldwork, I focused on interactions of L2 and L1 users of Japanese. I told people I was interested in such interactions and asked them to record their conversations for me. This method of data collection is described below in Section 4.2.1. In the process of fieldwork, I narrowed down my analytical focus to the experience of L2 speakers. I therefore shifted my

efforts and interviewed them to gain an overview of how they perceive their repertoire and how the languages they use are distinguished depending on context. I introduced my research as research on the lived experiences of L2 users of Japanese. I conducted more interviews and started to interview the same individuals a second and some of them a third time (see Section 4.2.4). Main places where I met with my interlocutors were the greater Tokyo area, Osaka in West Japan, and Sendai in Northeast Japan.

Over the total period of data collection within the frame of this project from 2021 to 2025, I received several recordings of unstructured conversational interactions, and I conducted many hours of interviews (see the overview of the material in the next section). I recorded all interviews with a recording device, sometimes additionally with my phone. Some interviews were also recorded with a video camera. In groups of more than three people, I used the 360° recording function of the camera to capture the scene in its entirety. Professional recording devices yield higher quality recordings and are useful in analyzing intonational nuances in the recordings. The video camera was used to capture the interactants' paraverbal behavior and gestures, as done in *microethnography* (LeBaron 2008) that investigates short segments of communicative conduct in great detail. The video camera proved particularly useful for recording multimodal dynamics when creating a language portrait (see Section 4.2.4 on this method). While developing the analytical chapters, I deemed a multimodal analysis of video recordings unnecessary to answer my research questions. Therefore, I referred to the videos only when needing to examine further contextualization cues to explore possible alternatives for interpreting communicative behavior (see Section 4.3 in this chapter for an overview of analytical devices).

4.2.2 Overview of data material

In this section, I give a general overview of the data material. As this is a qualitative study, I do not intend to quantify data or insights in any way. The table below (Table 3) illustrates the overall work done for data collection during the project. However, I reduced detailed transcription, coding, and analysis of the data to a few extracts of recordings, interviews, and vignettes that are part of the field notes. I discuss methodological reflections on each method in the following sections.

Table 3. Overview of data material

	Number	**Length**
Audio recordings of interactions	41	19:50:00
Interviews	40	52:29:54
– with playback elements	14	
– with language portraits	40	
– with story prompts	5	
Field notes	approx. 400 pages	

As this study takes a speaker-centered approach to lived experiences of competence, I introduce the participants along with the extracts from the data I collected from them in the analysis chapters.

4.2.3 Audio recordings

I started my investigation by collecting audio data of unstructured conversations between L1 and L2 users of Japanese. What I was looking for were instances of explicit metapragmatic discourse (see Theory Chapter XY) that spontaneously emerge in conversations. I assumed that such discourses tell me something about perceptions of communicative competence. I approached mainly L2 users of Japanese and asked them to record one or more conversations for me. I used this approach in my previous research and found it useful to investigate spontaneously occurring metapragmatic discourse on competence (Grosser 2023b). They were free to choose a place, time, and conversational partner. This resembles the "cession of control method" used by Anderson (2009: 99–103). It is also part of the standard methodical inventory in interactional sociolinguistics, which investigates interpretations in so-called natural or unstructured settings (e.g., Gordon & Tannen 2021; Tannen 2005 [1984]). Naturality and less constraints imposed by the researcher have been ideological described as "authentic" conversation, a particular concern in studies of linguistic variation, for example (Eckert 2014). Such a view on conversation that strips it off from its sociopolitical dimension and assumes that there is something such as authentic conversation is problematic (Gaudio 2003). It subscribes to the idea that there is something in mundane or ordinary conversation that is inaccessible to the researcher through their presence or that of a recording device (Bucholtz 2003). Authenticity of conversation is ideological in the sense that researchers treat it as a representation of a speech event that would have occurred without a recorder. The

observer effect or *observer's paradox* (Labov 1972) has been discussed as the influence that the researcher's presence exerts on a speech event. This can be applied both to recordings in which the interactants know that the researcher will listen to them at a later stage and to interviews in which the researcher is present.

Researchers working in the interactional sociolinguistic paradigm, however, started to rethink recording and recorders. Gordon (2013) demonstrates how recorders can become the object of investigation, analyzing how interactants orient to the recording device, for example, by addressing it directly in recordings. Hazel (2016: 463) argues that "[i]t is entirely appropriate for participants involved in such a situated activity to orient to this parallel, albeit liminal, feature, even when doing so by pretending that it is not happening." I found instances where participants oriented to being recorded, too. For example, they made the activity of recording salient when addressing me directly in the recording. And I reflected on the issue of recording even further during playback interviews and informal check-ups with my interlocutors. The following example illustrates my participants' orientation to the recorder. This example is taken from a recording provided by Chen and her partner Junya (who I already introduced in the Theory Chapter Section 3.3). They recorded their talk at home. In the following extract, the recording comes to an end.

Extract 4.1: Good luck with transcript

01	Chen:	kiru?	*should we stop?*
02	Junya:	~~u~~m.	*yeah.*
03	Chen:	((2,1)) [ne.	*((2,1)) [right*
04	Junya	[sorosoro (araoo) kka.	*[let's (clean).*
05	Chen:	so da ne.	*right.*
06	Junya	ki°°ru.°°	*st°°op.°°*
07	Chen:	okkeh =	
08	Junya:	=↑ka:y.	
09	Chen:	unlock.	
10	Junya:	good luck with transcript,=	
11	Chen:/Junya:	=((both chuckle))	
12	Junya:	>kore de kireba ii.<	*>i stop here?<*
13	Chen:	~~u~~m.	*yeah.*
		((recording stops))	

Chen and Junya negotiate stopping the recording (lines 1–2). Chen accompanies the action of unlocking the recording device with verbalization (line 9). Junya then addresses me and

wishes me "good luck with transcript" (line 10). From our previous interviews, he was aware that I would transcribe the recordings and that it would consume a significant amount of time (see also Section 4.2.7 on transcribing). He also switches to English here to address me, while he continues to use Japanese with his partner (line 12). Individuals draw on the recorder as a resource for achieving humorous effects (Gordon 2013), which is also evident in this example. Here, the fact of being recorded is addressed explicitly in discourse. Addressing the researcher has been found in previous research on couple talk (e.g., Piller 2002: 50–52).

Kiru ('to stop') functions as contextualization cue that draws attention to action of recording in which Chen and Junya adopt roles as speakers and listeners and participants in this project. This momentary role is ceased with stopping. The physical act of stopping the recording and the pragmatic act of stopping a role or performed conversation are connected by metapragmatics.

I gradually shifted away from the cession of control method to collect recordings. Some individuals I approached were reluctant to participate in my research by providing recordings. I then focused more on interviews in which I had more control of grasping more complex contextualization. For example, my initial design focused on interactions in Japanese only. However, moving a bit forward with my research, many individuals reported that they mix languages, for example, Japanese and English as a Lingua Franca in their interactions. I decided to include these and tried to pay justice to the multilingual reality of my interlocutors.

In the case of couples, most of them recorded conversations with each other, for example, when having lunch or dinner at home. Some other individuals recorded their interaction with friends at restaurants or during tandem activities. The aim was to first get an overview of emergent topics. I later used these recordings as input for playback interviews (Section 4.2.4). My participants recorded either with their phone or a recording device. The ubiquity of smartphones makes it easier to create flexibility for participants to record. It thus may lower the hurdle to agree to such an activity where they share snippets of their private lives. This especially goes for researching couples or the family as private spaces (see, e.g., Purkarthofer 2019 on the advantages of using smartphones for recordings).

I participated in only a few of the recordings that were not interviews. The purpose was to reflect on my own communicative practices and competence. I do not analyze these data

in this thesis. Nevertheless, they helped me reflect on myself and how participation framework and status influence the conversation.

4.2.4 Interviews

Interviews are the most vital data source in this project. At first, I planned to use them as an add-on to make sense of recorded data. As I gradually shifted my approach from interaction-centered to speaker-centered, I deemed interviews to be more fruitful in answering my research questions. It aligns with prior research that investigates lived experiences of language. This change in perspective is inspired by Busch's (2013) work on multilingualism and how subjects perceive, construct, and evaluate their repertoires.

The role of interviewing has been thoroughly discussed in sociolinguistics. I start with some general considerations about interviews and the procedures involved. Then, I discuss the different interviewing methods I used in detail in chronological order, meaning the order in which I incorporated them into my research design. I infuse my review of the literature that methodologically reflects on interviews in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology with segments in which I discuss my own experience with this method and its variants.

Competence, interaction, and co-construction

One standard procedure to understand people's lives is to ask them questions. From early on, sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology proposed conceptual models and practical interventions to understand what is going on in an interview situation. Briggs' (1986) classic work on the role of interviews in sociolinguistic research draws attention to the process by which researchers learn how to become interviewers. By developing a repertoire of *metacommunicative resources* to engage in learning and questioning activities, fieldworkers can better understand the communicative practices of the people and contexts they study. Briggs outlines how researchers must be socialized in the routines of local knowledge transmission. Building on Briggs' work, Cole (2019) argues that including the events leading to an interview, and the events following the interview, helps establish a larger picture of how rapport emerges in fieldwork encounters, and how this shapes the interview and its analysis.

Researchers now treat interviews as a *social practice* (Talmy 2010), a form of interaction that goes beyond unidirectional transmission of information from the interviewee to the interviewer. Interviews have often been framed ideologically as methods to access facts and

an individual's perception of truth. They have been seen as mechanisms for transforming private thoughts into public discourse, enabling individuals to participate in collective life (Briggs 2007). When conceptualizing interviews as a social practice, however, the researcher takes into account the collaborative and interactional nature inherent in this speech event (Talmy 2011, see also Erickson & Shultz 1982). In this view, the interviewer does not merely extract knowledge from the interviewee but actively participates in co-constructing the *text* of an interview. This allows for an interactional analysis of interviews that illuminates participants' positioning and reflexive re-orientation within the interview frame (Deppermann 2013). In her review of interviews in anthropology, Koven (2014: 509) argues "that it is unnecessary to posit a rigid distinction between naturalistic and artificially occurring data because interviews can be conducted and analyzed in interactionally and culturally sensitive ways." This is possible, as interviews yield not only *denotational*, but *interactional text* (Silverstein 1993) that indexes their positioning vis-à-vis various scales of social contexts (Wortham et al. 2011). This means that an interview analysis should not only concentrate on interviewees' thematic statements, but consider interactive dynamics as well (Talmy 2011; see also 4.3 in this chapter)

Reflections on metacommunicative competence

As a researcher interested in perceptions of competence, I use Briggs' (1986, 2007) insights to reflect on my interviewing practice. Listening to my interviews, I often feel unsatisfied with how I phrase my questions. At various points when I revisited the interview, I asked myself why I did not follow up on my interlocutors' answers. In retrospect, I interpret these instances as situations in which I failed to keep track of potentially relevant topics that could have been explored further. I also felt that the progress of the interview varied depending on the language I used (see, for example, Ohta & Prior 2019 or Pavlenko 2007: 174 on language choice in research interviews). Japanese is perhaps my weakest language in terms of interviewing, and I felt most confident in interviewing in German. I also conducted many interviews in English. Language choices and competences were an object of continuous reflection. Researchers in multilingual contexts may adjust their language choice to spaces and relation to the interlocutor (Holmes et al. 2016). They also experience varied reactions to their perceived fluency when working in a language one still needs to familiarize oneself with (Tanu & Dales 2015). Therefore, the question of how competent one is within and across languages is subject to ongoing negotiations. Some fieldworkers have thus called for a more

transparent approach in which researchers explicate their process of learning languages during fieldwork and their perceived limitations in working with these languages (Gibb & Danero Iglesias 2017), as well as strategies to overcome such limitations (Moore 2009).

My varied impression of the interviews, however, rather mirrors the social relation and degree of intimacy, closeness, or friendship I already had established with my interlocutors. In other words, my emotional response when revisiting interviews is shaped by my perception of rapport and its intensity with the interviewee, and my ideologies of how an interview should be conducted (Briggs 1986, 2007). Some of the Japanese interviews were conducted with people friends introduced to me. Therefore, I did not know them so well, and I felt less confident during the interview. Most of the German interviews, in contrast, were conducted with close friends. In these interviews, I felt more confident and had an overall positive impression after the interview. But there are also some cases of interviews in German or English with people I had less prior interaction with. When reviewing these interviews, I noticed my hesitance to follow up on certain topics and my insecurity when proceeding with the interview.

An advantage of interviewing is that my interlocutors had an image of the *genre* of interviewing. They had a rough idea of what the procedure would look like, being familiar with such a question-and-answer format, even though I show in my reflections on interviewing that interviews are much more than that. For this reason, some fieldworkers advise not to use the expression "interview" in the Japanese context to minimize uneasiness that interlocutors might feel when being asked to participate in an interview (McLaughlin 2020: 164, but see a counter-stance in Brumann 2020: 196). I mostly work with university-educated individuals with non-Japanese socialization. As these individuals have some knowledge of cultural or social sciences, I kept using the expression "interview" to introduce my research. In contrast to my request for recordings, I experienced that people were much more willing to be interviewed than to record themselves with a friend or their partner. Recordings of private interactions are more intrusive as they enter a sphere of the participants that they might deem as more private than an interview situation. I understood that interviews are more accessible to my interlocutors, with a bounded timeframe, participation frame, and interactional frame.

Playback interviews

Playback interviews belong to the methodical repertoire of interactional sociolinguistics. They originate in research on counseling sessions in psychotherapy and have later been adapted to sociolinguistic inquiries (Erickson & Shultz 1982; Fanshel & Moss 1971; Gumperz 1982; Labov & Fanshel 1977; Tannen 2005 [1984]). Researchers use playback sessions to check their interpretation of communication in audio or video recordings or written records (Luke & Gordon 2011). In the early stages of my project, I used this method and played back selected parts of the recordings to my participants and asked them questions. I tried open-ended questions ("What do you think about the interaction you just listened to?") and specific questions ("Why did you use polite style here instead of plain style, as in the rest of the conversation?"). This procedure aimed to elicit interlocutors' language ideologies emerging in explicit metapragmatic discourse that unfolds when talking about the recorded segments that are replayed or *cited* to them (Grosser 2024a). In this way, playback interviews are also analyzed as interactional events. I integrated playback sequences in interviews that dealt with individuals' language biographies. I present one example of talk that ensued from playback in Chapter 7, Section 7.2.4, which is about compliments on Japanese.

In subsequent steps, I collected fewer audio recordings and therefore conducted fewer playback sessions. What is more, some participants reported feeling uncomfortable during playback, because it was strange for them to listen to their voice in a recording.[43] L2 users of Japanese felt conscious about potential linguistic mistakes they made in the recorded interactions, even though I tried to assure them from the start that I was not interested in evaluating their mistakes in Japanese. Some participants did not have much to comment on the segments that I replayed to them. As researchers have noted, playback requires an already established degree of rapport between the participants and may also lead to further deepening of the relationship between researcher and interlocutor through collaborative activities (e.g., Gal 2013: 118; Rampton 2017; Sicoli 2020). I felt that it was not the playback sessions that yielded a deepened relationship with the participants, but rather biographical or narrative interviews.

[43] Perhaps the same happened to me when I revisited my interviews, which is why I evaluate my interviews in Japanese less favorably. Shifting between objective and subjective lenses here involves discomfort.

Biographical and narrative interviews

Aligning with the speaker-centered approach adopted in this thesis, I conducted narrative interviews to trace the biographical pathways of my interlocutors and their lived experiences in Japan. Therefore, all interview segments I present in this thesis are based on this interviewing method. The purpose of these interviews was to understand participants' repertoire formation on the one hand, and how some life events or moments shaped their perceptions of languages, communicative resources, contexts, and competences, on the other hand.

Ochs & Capps (2002: 2) define *narrative* as "a way of using language or another symbolic system to imbue life events with a temporal and logical order, to demystify them and establish coherence across past, present, and as yet unrealized experience." In other words, individuals use narratives to make sense of the world. At the same time, narratives are embedded in interactional contexts—such as research interviews—and therefore need to be analyzed not as purposely faithful retellings of past life events. Instead, they are interactionally accomplished performances in which narrators select their stories and present them as salient to the interviewer (De Fina & Georgakopoulou 2012; Labov 2013). Biographical and speaker-centered methods draw on narratives in interviews to understand a subject's sense of the self (for an overview of the literature on biographical and narrative research, see Purkarthofer 2022).

Kim (2022) proposes a model that conceptualizes language biographies as a *metapragmatic discourse* emerging within narrative accounts. He presents three dimensions of positioning within narratives: a biographic, interactive, and socio-metapragmatic dimension (Kim 2022: 234). When telling about past experiences, narrators position themselves vis-à-vis narrated actors, events, ideologies, and accomplish social identification (Wortham 2000; Wortham & Reyes 2021). I outline the analytical procedure for examining such narratives in Section 4.3. Alongside positioning and narration, Busch (2021 [2013]: 35–36) emphasizes that narrators' remembering and recollection of life events build the foundation on which biographical accounts are reconstructed. I subsume biographic, narrative, as well as playback interviews under the term *retrospective interviewing methods* to capture interactants' orientation toward past events in these settings. We have to keep in mind, however, that "personal accounts do not render experiences as they 'really are' as already the process of perception is repeatedly refracted through the prism of earlier perceptions integrated into socioideological, narrative frames" (Busch 2022: 295).

Perceptions of language competence are therefore embedded in past or contemporary dominant metapragmatic discourses of competence.[44]

Linguistic biographies, articulated through speakers' accounts, are linked to evaluations of languages in one's own repertoire (Busch 2019: 127–130, 2021; Spitzmüller 2022a: 263–266). To elicit such perceptions, Busch also pioneered a method of creating language portraits as a stimulus to start a conversation on languages, communicative resources, and experiences of interactions (Busch 2012b, 2016, 2021 [2013]). I will elaborate on this method in the next section.

Language portraits

Speaker-centered approaches to competence explore individuals' perceptions of linguistic or communicative repertoires, as introduced in the Theory Chapter. Busch draws inspiration from phenomenology and developed a method that engages participants to creatively represent their repertoire through a body silhouette.[45] Drawing on Merleau-Ponty (2012 [1945]), she places the perceiving subject and body at the center of experiencing language (see also Ochs 2012 for a related approach). A repertoire, she claims, "carries traces of its inscription in the body, traces which—triggered by current perceptions—can be invoked in the form of pleasurable or angst-ridden memories" (Busch 2012b: 520). Language portraits thus offer a way to detect some of these inscriptions and memories. They connect perceptions of resources with emotions, as these are anchored in the body. Krumm (2001) devised an activity including an image of a body silhouette onto which narrators can draw as a method to visually represent an individual's multilingual repertoire. This was later adapted and refined by Busch et al. (2006) and, for example, Busch (2012b, 2018, 2021). In the context of Japanese, Iwasaki (2018, 2021a, 2021b, 2022) has used language portraits to trace trajectories of developments in Japanese-as-L2-users' repertoires.

I introduced language portraits at the start of the interview often as "a little creative drawing activity." I experimented with different input strategies. I refrained from giving a detailed explanation of language portraits before the interview. As I conducted most

[44] The social configuration that speakers in inhabit when producing discourse is thus set in *metadiscursive regimes* (Bauman & Briggs 2003; Park 2013), i.e., the frameworks that structure how we talk about communicative practices.

[45] The sample can be found here: https://heteroglossia.net/Sprachportraet.123.0.html and in the Appendix.

interviews face-to-face, I instructed my interviewees orally at the start of the session. I provided DIN A4 pages with a body silhouette and blank pages in case participants wanted to draw their own silhouette. I also provided markers (felt-tipped pens) in 15 colors and a black ballpen. The model inputs can be found in the Appendix, Section C. I invited my participants to think about their languages, ways of speaking, and communicative resources, and draw them onto the silhouette. In earlier stages of the project, my input was (what I now see as) insufficient in the sense that some participants wrote the names of languages in different colors onto the silhouette. While these cases certainly yielded interesting results, which I could take up in the ensuing interview, the portraits clashed with my original imagination of this method. In later stages, I improved my input, and participants would include a short index listing all their resources first, before drawing on the silhouette. Formulating an input for this activity is a question of balance. Too much input might already paint an image of a desired outcome into the participants' heads. Not enough input, in contrast, left them unsure about what the actual procedure was. As I did not undergo extensive training in biographic sociolinguistic methods, I now see the changes in the outcomes of the portrait as a mirror of my development as a researcher using this method.

Another concern for me was how to call the "things" that the participants should draw onto the silhouette. The language portrait method inevitably reifies languages as bounded, nameable entities, which is criticized by researchers working, for example, in the *translinguistics* paradigm (see, e.g., Pennycook 2016 on this discussion). In my revised input, I sometimes included "dialect" or "forms or ways of communication" to elicit a broader range of resources, not only nameable languages. Some participants then included music or communication on social media into their language portraits. While being aware of the issues with *language* and adjacent concepts, I argue that a compartmentalized language is still the reality for many of my participants, and this term's usage is justified. I would therefore keep languages as entities, since I regard a repertoire approach as suitable for comparing perceptions of languages and competences. This approach ensures not to bind off languages from other forms of communicative resources. I also assume that people problematize received notions of language themselves, because "in their everyday talk about languages, people both use common language labels and show an awareness that these labels are open to negotiation," as Pennycook & Otsuji (2019: 78) observe in their fieldwork on metalanguage.

A language portrait is a creative achievement situated in times and spaces; it is a product that emerges in the speech event of the interview and might look different in other times and

spaces. In order to capture the creative process, I recorded all sessions on audio, and some also on video. There are many approaches to interaction within the drawing sequence, and I mostly chose to stay silent. However, I did not actively observe their activities. I did not want to give the impression of observing them during drawing, as some individuals may feel uncomfortable drawing in front of somebody else. I sometimes left the room or my seat when I interviewed in a café, to allow space and time for them to think about their portrait individually. I also conducted this activity with couples or groups. In these cases, more interaction during the drawing activity unfolded, as participants talked to each other while drawing. This allows for an interactional analysis of creative action, which is beyond the scope of this thesis, but could be investigated in the future, as interactions during the drawing activity have not received much attention in the literature on language portraits (but see De Meulder & Kusters 2022; Singer 2022 for examples that point toward this direction).

In the interviews based on the portraits, I asked the participants to explain their choices for color and position to me. In my experience, the participants attach more meaning to the placement of their resource than to the color choice. However, some participants associate colors with the colors included in the national flag of a country. The aim of this thesis is not to give an account of tendencies or psychological associations between colors, body representations, and communicative resources. Therefore, I used the portraits rather as a stimulus for starting a conversation on languages, perceptions, and experiences (see my analysis in Chapter 6). In retrospect, many participants reported that they enjoyed the activity and felt comfortable, in contrast to being confronted with their voice in playback sessions. I regard this activity as a creative way to make the atmosphere of interview settings more relaxed, especially for those who perceive interviews as formal or strict.

Several participants told me that they experience the activity as therapeutic. Consider the following example. This is taken from a second interview I had with Carlo, an Italian professional working at a university in Sendai (see also the extract in Section 7.2.1 in the empirical chapter on compliments). I collected a second portrait from him on my second field trip to Japan. Toward the end of the interview, I asked him how he felt about doing the portrait activity again.

Extract 4.2: It's like a therapy

01	Florian:	how was it to do this again?
02	Carlo:	no ↑>nice nice<↓ (it's) it's like a therapy=((laughs))
03		[( )
04	Florian:	[$a bit yeah yeah.$ [a bit.
05	Carlo:	[( ) i like it. (like it) (.) [>thank you thank you.<
06	Florian:	[°yeah.°

To describe the drawing activity as "a therapy" points to a private or interior dimension that is involved in the interview, as therapy as an institutionalized genre mainly fosters a reflection on inner states. Drawing on the portrait might be perceived as a soothing or relaxing activity. At the same time, therapy can bring forth a range of emotions and potentially negative memories. Using this method made me think about how much influence the research has on the research participants (see also Section 4.1.6 on ethics). Every interaction lays out avenues for subsequent response and action. In soliloquy, it is impossible to identify what thoughts participants have *after* being interviewed. Sometimes, the influence may not be evident to the participants themselves. This is why continuous engagement and check-ins may be helpful to navigate the complexities of contact and ethics (as I introduced in Section 4.1.6).

Story prompts

As I became more and more interested in JL2 users' narratives of experiences in Japan, I sought ways to elicit such stories more systematically. Initially, I hoped that by using language portraits, participants would come up spontaneously with situations that remained in their memory. Some participants did tell me such stories, but I decided to try out a prompt that my interlocutors can use to formulate an autobiographic account. This account yields a vignette (e.g., Busch 2022). Such prompts are commonly used in narrative interviews (e.g., Labov 2013). I used this method during my second and third fieldwork. I took inspiration from Takeuchi (2015). She included scene-focused questions as part of her interview protocol: "Are there any language-related 'episodes,' memorable stories, eye-opening moments that you'd like to share with me?" (2015: 285). I was looking exactly for such episodes. I created a prompt to inquire explicitly about moments in which my interlocutors experienced a strong emotional response in a context of using Japanese. Li (2011) also proposes to zoom in on these events in a *moment analysis* that stimulates and recalls

interlocutors' memories of pivotal events, which they describe in retrospect as influential for their pathway (see Theory Section 3.2.1 on *moments*).

In contrast to general questions, such prompts invite interlocutors to think about and narrate a more expansive story. As part of the prompt (Appendix C), I asked them: "Is there an episode in which you felt uncomfortable or insecure using the language?" (i.e., Japanese). I deliberately chose the expressions "uncomfortable" and "insecure" because I noticed these expressions coming up in the data I collected in previous stages of the project. My interlocutors used these words to describe events and contexts where they experienced using Japanese as challenging. By focusing on such *condensed scenes*, I wanted to explore how the "narrated lived experience of language often crystalli[z]es around moments of irritation, of feelings of being out of place, of discrepancies between self-perception and perception mirrored by others" (Busch 2022: 297). The story prompts yielded narratives in which my interlocutors told me about their perceptions of interactions and how these perceptions are constituted by, as well as constitutive of, experiences of competence.

4.2.5 Observations

I made sparing use of observation, which in classic ethnographies takes on a significant role. However, as Blommaert & Dong (2020: 28) remind us: "You observe all the time." This is true for my fieldwork. I observed my surroundings all the time while in Japan, mostly mundane interactions, especially in settings that involved interactions between L1 and L2 users of Japanese. This evolved into my image of how myriads of situations that form L2 users' everyday linguistic experiences unfold, even though I do not systematically analyze this data in this thesis. I observed interactions between my interlocutors, for example, in couples or family contexts. Sometimes I observed in public spaces, for example, when I witnessed my friends or unknown people interacting with shop assistants in a café. However, rather than attentive observation, I would call this way of seeing my participants and their interactions *overhearing* (Goffman 1979: 8). In some situations, I inevitably noticed how they used Japanese. Other contexts, such as visiting couples or families at their home, or having dinner with them together, offered opportunities to invest more attention in conscious observation. I also sometimes observed myself in some moments where I felt Japanese competence was at issue. I noted down some insights about those moments as vignettes as part of my fieldwork diary, to which I turn next.

4.2.6 Fieldwork diary and vignettes

Many ethnographers use a diary to write down their thoughts, interactions, experiences, and reflections while conducting fieldwork. I used a diary throughout my fieldwork to summarize my impressions from interviews and reflect on social relations, alongside other reflections on research, academia in general, and private topics. While I first wrote as a memory aid, I gradually made use of it in a more systematic way to revisit events that stuck in my mind and to trace how my thoughts have evolved during and across fieldwork stays. I present a first attempt to theorize and discuss the status of this diary in Grosser (2024b) as a text that reflects how public, professional, and private spheres merge in fieldwork. The diary is a *text artifact* that represents a historical chain of events in a person's life (Nozawa 2007). As Blommaert & Dong (2020: 37, emphasis in original) put it, notes in a diary "provide us with invaluable information, not only about *what* we witnessed in the field, but even more importantly about *how* we witnessed it—amazed, outraged, amused, factual and neutral, puzzled, curious, not understanding, confident about our own interpretations." In essence, these notes provide a *contextualization* of fieldwork experiences. The diary presents different kinds of events, for instance, moments that saliently changed the trajectory of my research, along with more general thoughts about life in and out of academia.

Parts of the entries in a journal may be rendered as *autoethnographic vignettes* (Humphreys 2005) that represent an ethnographer's pathway of reflexive decision-making while conducting research. I present vignettes in Chapter 7. Both the diary and vignettes are entextualized material. I will explore the process of text-making and its implications in the next section.

4.2.7 Entextualization, transcription, and representation

Spoken data needs to be transformed into something durable and recontextualizable. The first step in this process is the recording, conducted with a recorder, which semiotically turns into a metalanguage.

> A tape recorder is the ultimate metalanguage. It purports to represent reality in a most pure and faithful manner, and turns subjects of whatever it records into its objects with no trace of this process of mediation and objectification. Whatever is recorded—speech, interviews, and events— had its subject when it was executed. Once recorded, however, the subject loses its ability to represent itself. The tape recorder does not allow speakers to explain how they frame

> and interpret their utterances. It mechanically takes the speaker's voice sound, and it mechanically excludes her metalanguage, because it is the tape recorder (and ultimately the researcher's interpretation) that is the metalanguage. (Inoue 2006: 214)

In other words, speech is made into *text*. Transcribing is a process by which sound is *entextualized*, not only in the scriptural sense of this concept, but also in the semiotic sense. Bauman & Briggs (1990: 74, emphasis in original) explain that entextualization "is the process of rendering discourse extractable, of making a stretch of linguistic production into a unit—a *text*—that can be lifted out of its interactional setting." Several steps in which the text is reworked and refined are necessary to render it readable to an audience. To get an overview of the contents of the recording, be it everyday conversations or interviews, I created inventories (*Gesprächsinventare*, see Deppermann 2008). Inventories contain information on participants, time, and setting of the interaction, and then summarize topics. I used a table format in which I set time stamps in the left column, contents in the middle, and an extra column to the right that lists segments of particular interest. I highlighted these passages in yellow. In subsequent steps, I used these inventories to select sequences to transcribe in detail. Transcribing all the data would not have been possible for a single person in the timeframe of a doctoral thesis.

Ochs (1979) argues in her seminal work that transcription is always selective. In my project, this applies to a global scale, i.e., finding the stretches of talk to transcribe that are relevant to my research questions. And then, it also applies to an in-text scale when selecting the degree of detail to transcribe. Especially in the conversation-analytic tradition (for example, Jefferson 2004b; Sacks et al. 1974), as well as interactional sociolinguistics (for example, Gumperz 1982; Günthner 1993; Tannen 2005 [1984]) much emphasis is put on detailed transcription, such as stress, lengthening, changes of pace, volume, and voice register. This requires several rounds of revising and refining the transcript, thus making the process of transcribing "a situated practice" (Mondada 2007: 809). We need to keep in mind, however, that even such detailed transcription can always be only an approximation of the denotational and interactional text of talk. Duranti (2006) claims that transcripts cannot fully represent reality but rather serve as models that reveal specific patterns and properties.

In recent years, researchers have theorized and critically reflected on transcribing as a process and the contextual and social conditions under which we transcribe. Bucholtz (2000) describes how transcription is embedded in politics and power, when the transcriber decides on the contents of transcription and the way it is represented. She calls for researchers'

reflexivity in transcribing activities. Rendering spoken discourse as text is a way to gain authority, for example, in institutions (Park & Bucholtz 2009). Transcriptions are used as a tool to *represent* instances of speech events, and as a *process* (Cavanaugh 2021). This may involve collaborative activities, for example, when working together on a transcript with informants, which can in turn become the object of analysis again (Vigouroux 2007, 2009). Transcriptions are, therefore, always infused with the interpretation of the listening subject (Cavanaugh 2021: 156–157). Inoue (2018: 226) describes transcriptions "as a specific semiotic process, labor, and social relationship." This conceptualization synthesizes the insights from research on transcriptions and the activity of transcribing.

Issues of choice, selectivity, power, and representation particularly surface when transcribing multilingual data. Kalocsányiová & Shatnawi (2022) ask how migrants' voices can be adequately represented in transcriptions. Jaffe (2006) makes similar observations when she discusses transcription of non-standard varieties. In my project, I was also confronted with choices to represent multilingual data. I worked with different varieties of German, from Germany and Austria, English—also as a lingua franca—and Japanese, also used as L2. For questions about transliteration of different writing systems, see Appendix Section A.

Selection and representation inevitably pose challenges to transcribing. But they also initiate a process of reflection. When preparing extracts of transcription for this thesis, questions of formatting and design arise as well. Well-thought-out design of text influences the reader's interpretation of its content (see also Spitzmüller 2013a on graphic design and its sociolinguistic interpretation). The genre of a thesis allows more freedom than other publication formats, where transcripts have to be adjusted to the design of the publishing house (see, e.g., Cavanaugh 2021 for an illustration of this process). What is more, transcribing relies on technological affordances. I experimented with several programs available for transcription (f4transkript, [46] ELAN, [47] EXMARALDA, [48] and the in-built function in MAXQDA[49]). I also tried out automatic transcription (HappyScribe[50]) and the automatic transcribing function in MAXQDA in cases in which data regulations permitted

[46] https://www.audiotranskription.de/
[47] https://archive.mpi.nl/tla/elan/
[48] https://exmaralda.org/de/
[49] https://www.maxqda.com/
[50] https://www.happyscribe.com/

automated processing of the audio file. For some English and German interviews, it worked satisfactorily to create a first text that could be reworked and refined. However, I deemed the subsequent steps when revising transcripts to represent more accurately the speakers' emphasis, tempo, pace, etc., as time-consuming. While delivering some promising initial results, I decided that automatic transcription is yet to reach the level of detail that is needed for interactional sociolinguistic or conversation analytic analyses.

Transcribing—or modes of entextualization in general—always involves interpretation, to which I will turn next when discussing the analytical procedure.

4.3 Analytical frameworks and devices

The object of analysis is *discursive interaction*. Discursive interaction is constituted by instances of sign usage, mostly spoken language in the case of this thesis, along with other signs. These instances of use are embedded in talk of different genres with different interactional partners. In the following sections, I outline the process of decision-making when selecting the extract from recordings and interviews that I analyze in detail in this thesis. I regard this process as an entry into interpreting lived experiences of competence. When analyzing (auto-)biographic narratives, Pavlenko (2007) proposes to focus on language choice, content, context, and form. In a similar vein, Carr (2011: 124–125)

> suggests an approach to interview analysis that connects the *content* of interview data with (1) the immediate context of the interview, (2) the way context emerges and changes during an interview, (3) the relationship between the interviewee, the interviewer, and other less immediate parties who elicit and evaluate what is said, (4) the cultural conventions that shape what counts as a meaningful speech in the first place, (5) the relationship of the interview to previous occasions of speaking, and (6) the relevant stakes of speaking and interests of speakers. (emphasis in original)

I keep these anchors in mind in the analyses that follow, but review *contexts* and *forms* here in detail. After introducing my approach to interpreting the data, I introduce *stance and context*, and *order and sequence* as methods to approach the data. I conclude with a reflexive account of *ascribing* and interpreting the actions in discursive interaction.

4.3.1 Entries of interpretation

While transcribing represents the first step of interpretation and analysis, coding organizes the entry points for the analysis and subsequent interpretative work. In the initial phases of the project, I followed a strict sequence of transcribing, then coding. Over time, I continuously revised my coding scheme, using a bottom-up approach (e.g., Saldaña 2021). In later stages, I abandoned strict coding, as I started to make more use of the interview inventories and notes as an aid for selecting relevant segments from recorded data and interviews. At that point, I already had an image of relevant codes in mind. I used MAXQDA for coding my data. However, instead of relying solely on these technological affordances, I favored an approach that could now be called old-school by printing out longer stretches of a transcript I wanted to focus on in the analysis. I found this different modality useful to manually mark relevant turns with colored pens. It also helped refine the transcript in terms of prosody, for example, for indicating stress and changes in pace and pitch volume. Through listening and following the transcripts on paper, I became aware of patterns of metricalization and prosodic patterns in my data. With refinement of the transcripts, I also recalibrated the analytical lens. I do not elaborate on the implications that these technical modalities have for the process of entextualizing speech here (but see Inoue 2018), but rather use this example to illustrate how changes in materiality affected my interpretative process.

Coding in the process of interpretative work is the method to connect the dots. In linguistic anthropology, this is achieved by conducting a *discourse analysis beyond the speech event* (Wortham & Reyes 2021). Such an analysis takes the *event* as a departure point to understand social action and identification of any kind (see also the Theory Section 3.2.1 on *event*). The analytical work includes charting narrating and narrated events, and, subsequently, iterative examination of social actors' use of indexical expressions, citational practices, and evaluations. The analysis is conducted first within-event by looking at event-internal *entextualization* in interaction, and then cross-event by chaining these events to processes of *enregisterment* (Wortham & Reyes 2021: 42–74). The analytical devices and procedures will be further introduced in the next sub-section. While discourse analysis sets the *event* as an analytical vantage point, a speaker-centered approach focuses on *moments* and how they are experienced and retold by narrators or speaking subjects (e.g., Li 2011). By synthesizing the analysis of events and moments, I give an account of how individuals in Japan experience competence in various contexts.

The fieldwork diary helped develop the structure for the analytical chapters. The initial screening of my data formed into analysis of experiences of competence in the private sphere (Chapter 5). As a contrast to this domain, I looked at how my participants told me about their experiences of competence in other areas of social life. Here, narratives of language use at the workplace emerged (Chapter 6). Basing the empirical chapters on these two spheres, I eventually arrived at narratives of competence ascriptions in spaces that are perceived as rather public, as the third analytical vantage point (Chapter 7).

Before going into an in-depth analysis, relevant segments are selected from the pool of possible extracts of data. For me, this decision-making posed the biggest challenge when working on the structure of the thesis. All my interlocutors can tell me something about their experiences of language and competence in Japan. To select stories, segments, and extracts, researchers observe their own impressions and experiences in situ and in retrospect. While recollecting and revisiting memories and notes, the decision-making process goes through *intuitive loops* (B. Busch, personal communication), or *informed intuition* (Knott 2025), which develops iteratively through prior knowledge, experience, and feedback. Similar to what I ask my participants in interviews about memorable episodes, I think back on encounters and events that left a particular imprint on me during fieldwork periods. I then selected recordings and interviews and narrowed down my focus to specific longer segments within a single interview and cross-textual recurring topics. In this sense, intuition justifies my selection of extracts from the interviews with the individuals whose experiences I recount in this thesis (see also Chudnoff 2013: 145–148 on intuition as justifications). I regard intuition in decision-making as part of an individual's reflexivity while being immersed in the research process. I will return to reflexivity and its application in Section 4.3.4.

4.3.2 Stance and context

In this thesis, I treat stance as a theory as well as a method of analysis (see Theory Section 3.3). Examining how my interlocutors take stance in discourse is a method for understanding their experience of languages in Japan. I integrate stance with theories of *social positioning* that researchers employ as a method and vantage point of analysis (Bamberg 1997; Davies & Harré 1990; Kim 2022; Spitzmüller et al. 2017; Wortham & Reyes 2021, notwithstanding theoretical and epistemological differences in these approaches).

Some researchers who analyze positioning practices in discourse identify three levels that narrators engage in their stories (Bamberg 1997; Bamberg & Georgakopoulou 2008). How are individuals characterized in the narratives? (Level 1) How do the narrators position themselves to the audience? (Level 2) And how do they embed their stories in a world to make sense of themselves? (Level 3) This requires a distinction between a *narrating I*, and a *narrated I*. They inhabit the world of narrated events, along with other personae that are placed into and characterized in this world (Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann 2002: 25; Wortham & Reyes 2021).

By analyzing stance, I take on a speaker-centered perspective on their actions in and via discourse. A linguistic discourse analysis closely examines which elements of the structural affordances linguistic systems offer to their users are activated in *context*. Wortham & Reyes (2021) call these resources *indexical expressions*, including deictics, reported speech, and evaluative expressions. Indexical expressions arguably overlap largely with the more traditional notion of *contextualization cues* in interactional sociolinguistics. A contextualization cue is "any feature of linguistic form that contributes to the signalling of contextual presuppositions" (Gumperz 1982: 131). Research that employs these analytical devices focuses on speech styles, code-switching, citational practices (subsuming concepts such as reported speech and constructed dialogue, see Theory Chapter Section 3.4.3 for details), and prosodic signaling. Indexical expressions and contextualization cues are—perhaps necessarily—too broad as categories to reliably cover their variety in the extracts that I examine in this thesis. The analysis, therefore, looks for accumulation or *accretion* of signs across events until it reaches a level of being sufficient to arrive at an interpretation (Silverstein 1992), when an interpretation becomes plausible (Wortham & Reyes 2021).

I connect these features-in-contexts and interpret their occurrence with broader interactional and social contextualization in mind. This aligns with the program of interactional sociolinguistics, which aims at interpreting language use and its variation in interactive contexts (see the foundational work by Gumperz 1982, and overviews by Gordon & Tannen 2021 and Rampton 2017). The foundations go back to the sociology of interaction proposed by Goffman (e.g., 1959, 1981) and ethnomethodology developed by Garfinkel (1984 [1967]). Interactional sociolinguistics is grounded in an in-depth analysis of communicative conduct and interaction and interprets the speakers' inferential processes and how these processes are embedded in society, that is, how they are presupposed through social norms and how they (re-)create social norms.

The interpretation of the indexical configuration considers the background of an individual's lifeworld, their trajectory, and being, for example, their subject position as a migrant in Japan. The analyst keeps these dimensions in mind to arrive at a plausible interpretation of social action (Wortham & Reyes 2021). To integrate interactional, discursive, and subjective perspectives, Busch (2019) proposes *social positioning* as a method to analyze ideologies of communicative competence (see also Kim 2022; Spitzmüller et al. 2021; Spitzmüller et al. 2017).

4.3.3 Order and sequence

The interpretation of organized, accreted signs is the research program of different strands of conversation analysis and discourse analysis. To make speech interpretable for listeners, the signs need to be organized in such a way that they presuppose and at the same time (re-)create a pattern or order that is decipherable to the interlocutor—in other words, they form an *interactional text* (Silverstein 1976). Conversation analysis (and to some extent, US-American schools of discourse analysis) aims to uncover the underlying and formative properties of this structure of talk-in-interaction. By attending to *order within talk*, one can access interactants' construal of *social order* that goes beyond talk (Garfinkel 1984 [1967]; Goffmann 1983).

In my analysis of lived experiences of competence, I draw on the basic architecture of conversation, "principally turn construction, action sequencing, and repair" (Sidnell 2014: 364). As most data I present here is taken from interviews, the constructions of turns and sequences rely on their generic architecture—a question-answer format. The interview frame and the actual questions within this frame set the expectations for the procedure and sequencing (see also Tsui 1991). I devote special attention to *sequencing* and *sequentiality* in my analysis. Sequence is an onflow of accreted signs that gain semiotic relevance through the very fact that they rely on and rebuild this order.[51] Therefore, a sequence emerges along a

[51] Enfield (2011: 285–291) proposes *enchrony* as a concept that captures the underlying semiotic process of sequencing of social actions, i.e., the unit of an action that is followed by a response. Communicative signs bring about an effect, but this effect only becomes relevant through interpretation (assumptions about its relevance) within a response. See also Sacks et al. (1974: 728–729) on the *next-turn proof procedure*, established in conversation analysis, to understand a move through the (subsequent) response it yields.

temporal axis that builds the roadmap for interactants to achieve understanding (Deppermann 2015).

Sequences are also made relevant in narratives. My interlocutors describe moments in which they experience struggle in making sense of prior action, or scenes in which they contest communicative norms, for example, at the workplace. Narrative sequencing involves enumeration, mostly of three items. Enumeration relies on structural repetitions or parallelisms (Silverstein 1984; Tannen 2007 [1989]). They are part of a more fundamental *metricality* (as a quality) and *metricalization* (as a process) in discourse. Metricalization allows for construing sequences as *reflexive calibrations* (Silverstein 2021: 21–23). This means that a sequence (of repetition or parallelism) in narrative accounts emerges through the *poetic* or metrical organization of signs referring to prior signs in the co-text. Speakers achieve sequencing not only through metricalization through syntactic or lexical repetitions and parallelisms, but also leverage it through word stress, lengthening, and turn-level prosody that create rhythm (Auer et al. 1999).[52] Such paraverbal signs equally contribute to sequencing and organization in interaction.

Pioneering work on narrative analysis was done by Labov & Waletzky (1966) who investigated sequential organization of narratives. They identified the components *abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, result, and coda*. This order allows narrators to present themselves, as "telling a story provides a self-portrait" (Schiffrin 1996: 199). Through sequenced order, speakers can thus accomplish acts of identification and presentation within the given participation framework (Wortham 2000).

Sequence also emerges at a larger scale that departs from face-to-face interaction. It pertains to a more general question that my participants ask themselves when navigating communication in Japan: How should I respond? How should I communicate now? In this case, the sequence considers speakers' distribution of actions across turns and larger spatiotemporal planes. This resonates with the premises of linguistic-anthropological conversation analysis that views the relevance of an individual's response to action as prior to a formulation and description of such action (Enfield & Sidnell 2017: 35). I argue, however, that in order to arrive at an interpretation of a subject's lived experience (of language, or competence in particular), we need to attend to such formulations or descriptions of actions.

[52] Rhythms fractally recur at other scales of social life (see, for example, Chiba 2024; Lefebvre 2004). I assume that when we attend to rhythms at turn-level and their recurring pattern across events, we can elucidate a subject's perceptions of rhythms in life in other discursive realms.

As entitlement, accountability, and responsibility to carry out these formulations are distributed among speakers (Enfield 2017), I use the expression of *ascribing actions* to others, which will be discussed next.

4.3.4 Ascriptions and reflexivity

Interpretative work involves *action ascriptions* (Deppermann & Haugh 2022), the characterization of actions through categorization and labeling. These ascriptions are incorporated in any kind of talk. Here, I consider some meta-analytical consequences for ascriptions (of action, or more generally, of intentionality) and propose that the challenges of such a view on analyzing narratives of lived experiences can be overcome by methodological reflexivity.

In the context of the analysis, I ascribe meaning to the individuals' communicative actions that I describe, analyze, and try to explain by labeling or paraphrasing their discursive actions. Such action ascriptions are particularly dense when paraphrasing and summarizing transcribed (inter)action in the main text below the transcripts. Interpretation involves *ascriptions of intentionality*—the act of mind-guessing a rationale or motivation for behavior (see, e.g., Anscombe 1957; Duranti 2015). However, Enfield & Sidnell (2017: i) remind us that "[t]he labelling of actions is a meta-level process, appropriate only when we wish to draw attention to others' behaviours in order to quiz, sanction, praise, blame, or otherwise hold them to account." I do not have any of the mentioned speech act labels in mind when I attempt to interpret my data. Rather than holding my participants to account, I wish to *give an account* of their experiences through labeling and interpreting their communicative action. At the same time, this requires a continuous reflection on one's own pathway of becoming an analyst and arriving at an analysis. Analytic accounts always bear limitations of one's own reflexivity (Butler 2005; Silverstein 2001). Ascription of action is a rationalization of my interlocutors' conduct, and this rationalization mirrors my own ideology of communication, i.e., my ideology of what might be going on in interaction and narrative accounts. Reflexivity in analysis is mandatory, as Spitzmüller puts it:

> Both for interaction in and analysis of stancetaking practices, *knowledge* of the language-ideological framing (i.e. *register knowledge*) is mandatory in order to make sense of the narrative positioning. For analysis, however, knowledge alone is not sufficient. The ideological framing also needs to be *critically reflected*. (Spitzmüller 2022a: 261–262, emphasis in original)

Such reflexivity is developed through academic (or ethnographic) socialization in a broad sense, and through continuous questioning of one's own interpretative choices in a narrow sense. Reflexivity thus becomes part of the analytical circle. This is yet another piece of evidence for the intersubjective, multilayered nature of competence, the argument that I develop throughout this thesis. Competence is not only the object of my analysis, but reflexively recurs back to me, in this case, as a *competence to analyze*. All devices that are used to analyze the data can be applied to analyze myself (Bourdieu 2007). This stance of a researcher's reflexivity-in-analysis is not only emphasized in ethnographically and anthropologically oriented sociolinguistics, but also in other strands of (applied) linguistics that take discourse as an object of analysis, such as discourse linguistics (Spitzmüller & Warnke 2011: 199).

Reflexivity is part of academic rigor when choosing a specific lens to analyze and interpret data, i.e., when taking a *perspective* in the sense of Gal & Irvine (2019). Recalibrating a perspective requires reflexivity. At the same time, not all perspectives can be incorporated, and the analytical lens necessarily has to be a selective one.

> While at first sight this may sound redundant, naïve or, what is worse, self-serving, the simple act of acknowledging the existence of other frameworks or points of view, without necessarily engaging with them, should be seen – and practised – as an act of intellectual humility that emphasizes the limits of our knowledge and what we can and cannot be held accountable for. (Terkourafi 2025: 321)

Reflexivity as a method of analysis can be applied when taking a tripartite division as a lens of analytical heuristics. Theorization of three elements that constitute a system runs through semiotic, anthropological, and sociolinguistic investigation. Based on Peirce's (1867) tripartite model of *icon, index,* and *symbol*, Silverstein (1985) developed the *total linguistic fact*, consisting of *structure, usage,* and *ideology*. In any analysis of discursive action, he claims, we need to attend to the semiotic forms, how social actors use these forms in contexts, and how these actors interpret, construe, or rationalize structure and usage (see also Busch et al. 2022a: 6–10 and Spitzmüller 2026). The total linguistic fact thus guides the interpretive process. Silverstein's trias overlaps with Hanks (1996) formulation of *structure, activity,* and *ideology* that constitute communicative practices. In a similar vein, Park (2021b) suggests that *time, space,* and *affect* function as vantage points of metapragmatic analyses. While all these concepts may rather be categorized as theories, I condense the insights from such

tripartitions as a method of analyzing interaction. A triad in mind calibrates and thus sharpens the analytical lens.

5 Negotiating Language Choices in a Multilingual Relationship

5.1 Introduction[53]

In this chapter, I explore the experiences of a multilingual Japanese-as-L2-user, named Katharina, who is from Austria. To understand her subjective experiences in which issues of communicative competence are at stake, I expand my view towards interaction. In this case, I focus on interactions with an individual that is close to her—her partner Takashi, who is an L1 user of Japanese. The following analysis thus offers an *interactional* perspective on experiences of competence in the context of a multilingual, international relationship. This context is one example of how an L2 user of Japanese engages with this resource in the private domain. I will show, however, how their linguistic repertoires co-constitute each other respectively. I zoom in on the issue of *language choice* in this relationship. In this case, both Japanese and English would be options for everyday communication, but English has become the preferred choice over time. However, as the analysis will show, this choice is challenged by Katharina. I will present segments that illustrate how this negotiation unfolds in interaction.

Choice is a fundamental component of any linguistic action (Coulmas 2013). Yet, speakers make choices within normative social constraints (Blommaert 2005: 98–124). While many choices in communication are routinized and occur unconsciously, choosing a language to communicate correlates with a higher awareness, as it located at a higher level of metapragmatic functionality (Silverstein 2021; see also Section 3.4.1). A higher awareness of

[53] I first presented an analysis of Extract 5.5 in this chapter at the *JACET ELF SIG International Workshop* at Waseda University in Tokyo in December 2022. This led to a poster presentation at the *47. Conference of the Japanese Association of Sociolinguistic Sciences* in March 2023, and a short publication in the conference proceedings (Grosser 2023a). Parts of this chapter, Section 5.3.4 in particular, are based my book chapter (Grosser 2025) in Heinrich et al. (2025).

several options makes a choice more readily discussable and thus contestable.[54] The following analysis centers on metapragmatic discourse that emerges when speaking subjects in a relationship reflect on, interpret, and rationalize their arrangement of communicative resources and distinct languages.

In the context of the analysis at hand, stances are embedded in two different genres: recordings of the couple's at-home conversations and interviews with me. I reconstruct how they temporarily settle on a language choice by tracing their *pathway* of choices over several linked speech events (Wortham & Reyes 2021). These events form a chain of explicit metapragmatic discourses—stretches of talk in which the couple discusses their language choice (check Section 3.4 in the Theory Chapter). I map these linked speech events by looking at how the partners *take stances* and *attribute stances* to each other. These stances accrete within the process of in-event *entextualization* and cross-event *enregisterment* (Agha 2005). Stance accretion makes individuals' evaluations durable and interpretable as forms of identification and positioning beyond isolated speech events. I will uncover the stances that accrete in forming a language choice and how this choice, in turn, is repeatedly questioned.

In the interviews, the analysis relies on the interactional *presentation of accreted stances*. This means that a speaker presents another speaker's actions as habitual and routinized way of doing things (Damari 2010: 616). In other words, a speaker explicitly ascribes intentionality to the other. The aim of a stance analysis is therefore not to discover speakers' factual proportions of stances taken in the past, but rather how they make stances relevant in their private interactions and in interview settings. The process of making actions relevant is scaled through degrees of *investment* and *commitment* to a stance (Kiesling 2020; Kockelman 2004; and Section 3.3.6). These are degrees to which interactants commit to an utterance with markers of evidentiality and epistemic modality. These stances can be directed toward stance objects, i.e., the things evaluated. They can also be directed toward others' stances. The couple showcased in the following examples narrate events of their communicative routines and enact different levels of *positioning* in their stories about their daily life. They position themselves vis-à-vis each other (Level 1), the interview context and its—at times imagined—audience (Level 2), and make claims to their identities (Level 3) (Bamberg 1997). Instances of accreted stances and positionings with respect to decisions for choosing a language are thus

[54] Even though distinct languages may cognitively exhibit a high degree of perceived difference, this does not automatically translate into a high awareness of choices or ability to express the reason for choices (see Verschueren 2004 on *metapragmatic awareness*).

means to negotiate communication in a relationship. At the same time they *enact and perform* couplehood (Piller 2002) via these metapragmatic stances.

By taking stances, interactants do not only carry out evaluations, but also exhibit affective and emotional responses to language. These responses are tied to the linguistic repertoire that "evolves by experiencing language in interaction on a cognitive and on an emotional level" (Busch 2012b: 521). When interactants report about these experiences, alignments in stancetaking may diverge, giving rise to disagreement and conflict, in other words, *discordance in interaction* (Takekuro 2018). I will present some instances in which discordance arises in the couple's interactions and how it is interwoven with the issue of language choice.

The analysis follows a temporal trajectory of speech events, in an attempt to combine sequences in the couple's interaction and sequences in their life. To contextualize the overarching theme of this analysis, I first review studies that explore language choices of multilingual couples (Section 5.2). Then, I present the couple and chart the linked events in the analysis (Section 5.3). I follow the couple's discussions about language choice between English and Japanese, looking back at how they managed their choices at the beginning of their relationship (Sections 5.3.1). Then, I show how they discuss their choice during a long-distance relationship (Section 5.3.2), and after they moved in together in Osaka (Section 5.3.3). I focus on some attempts in using Japanese during that phase (Section 5.3.4), and then on issues why Japanese came to be dispreferred and English their default (Sections 5.3.5 and 5.3.6). Lastly, I show how they engage with German as a marginalized resource (Section 5.3.7). In the discussion, I summarize my findings by showcasing and exploring different *dimensions of language choice* (Section 5.4). The findings are further contextualized in view of a reformulation of communicative competence toward a *lived experience of communicative competence*. Connecting to the overachring questions of this thesis, this chapter shows how language choice is made relevant in connection to competences across the couple's repertoires, and how the speakers construct their stances when talking about their choice.

5.2 Multilingual couples and language choices

Several studies touch on the issue of language choices in multilingual relationships. In the Japanese context, these studies often concentrate on language socialization of children in family settings. (e.g., Takei & Burdelski 2018; Yamamoto 2001). There is less research on how couples negotiate and interpret their language choices in contexts of migration (but see, e.g.,

Kawahara & Okado 2009). Poore (2019), for example, draws on the notions of stance, indexicality, and language ideologies to understand how couplehood of Japanese and non-Japanese partners is discursively established. Studies on language practices in multilingual relationships emphasize the dynamic construction of identities in interaction. In non-Japanese settings, for instance, Damari (2010) presents discursive strategies that couples adopt to achieve identification as a couple via habitual stancetaking. Piller's (2002) seminal study on bilingual couples shows how couplehood is performed and enacted in discursive interaction. Thus, discourse is a foundational element of establishing an identity as a couple, as it emerges in patterned interaction (see also Bucholtz & Hall 2004). However, identities are always situated in larger sociopolitical contexts. For example, Heller & Lévy (1992) analyze experiences of partners in language-mixed relationships and their constructions of borders. They explain that language choices contribute to subverting and reproducing social structures. Gonçalves (2013a, 2013b) shows how national identities are performed in conversation of binational, multilingual couples. In her study, couples achieve *cultural hybridity* by positioning themselves with respect to practices centering around food preparation and consumption (Gonçalves 2013a).

As the mentioned studies show, language choices in a relationship are complex and affected by various parameters. A general tendency seems to be that couples adopt the dominant language of their local community. Piller (2001) reports that German-English bilingual couples choose their language for communication according to the dominant language of the community they live in. Faier (2009) describes similar language configurations of Japanese-Filipina couples in her ethnography on migration to rural Japan. Competence in Japanese is perceived to be a resource for participating in and becoming part of the local community and society. We can see in these studies that *space* is a resource and discursive outcome to build a relationship and, in a larger projection, a family (Lanza 2021).

In interviews, couples give additional reasons for their choices. For example, they describe a specific language configuration as a habit (Piller 2002: 137), thereby evoking an interactional trajectory of *routinization* as a result of their linguistic decisions. Multilingual couples may also reject strict language boundaries. One strategy would be to use more than one language or mix languages in conversation. Another option couples report is to choose a language that is not their (perceived) L1, or the national language of the country. Instead, they opt for a common L2, such as English as a lingua franca (ELF). In such a context, "ELF couples allow a relaxed attitude towards language mixing within the couple's shared range […]"

(Pietikäinen 2014: 1), thus embracing flexibility in alternating languages. For example, Pietikäinen (2018: 188) identifies various strategies that ELF couples use in conversation to "pre-empt misunderstandings" and actively work on accomplishing "shared understanding" in their interactions, thereby co-constructing and performing couplehood. Understanding—as a language-ideological notion—is a foundation for creating a shared life (see Section 3.4). Using a language that both partners acquired at a later stage in their life through formal education might lead speakers to perceive their ownership of this resource as shared. This might be due to, for example, less perceived imbalances in competences. What is more, Pietikäinen (2020) reports that L2-speakerhood as a preconceived identity is seldom made relevant in ELF interactions. ELF therefore is seen by some researchers as a resource that can diminish asymmetries in couple communication. However, we need to keep in mind that ELF as an academic concept and as a resource is imbued with ideologies of communication like any other communicative resource (Spitzmüller 2022a).

What is missing from these studies are insights we can gain from looking at instances of explicit metapragmatic discourse among partners, where a high awareness of choice is overtly explicated and put out to debate. While competences in language and issues of speakerhood are certainly factors guiding language choice and communication in a relationship, more dimensions need to be considered in the decision-making process. This is the site for the articulation of ideologies of communicative competence.

5.3 Pathways of language choice

In the following sections, I analyze linked events in which Katharina and Takashi narrate their perceived pathway of language choice and how they rationalize their choice.

5.3.1 The couple: Encounter and events

I first give a brief overview of some stages in Katharina and Takashi's relationship that are linked to speech events in which they address decisions about language choice. Katharina and Takashi met during her study abroad year in 2018 in Tokyo at an interpreter event. However, they did not pursue interpreting further after this event. At Katharina's time in Tokyo, they became a couple. Upon completing her studies in Japan, she returned to Austria. They kept in touch talking online over video chat and exchanging text messages daily. Katharina decided

to return to Japan to live with her partner. However, due to the entry restrictions that the Japanese government enforced for non-nationals during the Covid-19 pandemic from spring 2020, her plans to move had to be postponed. The start of my investigation of their language use was in summer 2021, when they were having a long-distance relationship. They recorded an online interaction in Japanese for me, and I conducted an interview with some playback parts on the basis of this recording (check 4.2.4 in the Methods Chapter). This first interview was conducted in Japanese. They married later in the same year.

At the start of my engagement with them, I expected the portions of Japanese and English to be balanced. I had some information on their language choices provided by Katharina. Later during my fieldwork, I observed that English had become more dominant, and Japanese was used less. Katharina made efforts to use more Japanese, since she wanted to improve her Japanese as preparation for moving to Japan. She was finally allowed to enter the country in late fall 2021. They recorded a few interactions in spring 2022 for me, again in Japanese (refer to 4.2.3 for an explanation of the recording method and procedure). Here, dominant use of English first emerges as an issue that Katharina addresses in their private conversation. I conducted a second interview with them in September 2022 at their home in Osaka, less than one year after they moved together. I used language portraits in this interview (as explained in 4.2.4). We mostly used English in this interview. However, our communication on the days when we spent time together during this fieldwork period also included large portions of Japanese. I made another visit to Japan in April 2024, where I conducted a follow-up interview with Katharina and Takashi, also in English. Since then, we are staying in contact and we meet when they are visiting Austria or when I am in Japan.

5.3.2 Time for Japanese

Over the course of their relationship, Katharina and Takashi settled for English as their default language for communication. They repeatedly discuss and explain this decision in their interactions. I identified instances where they explicitly oriented toward language issues in recorded conversations and addressed them in our interviews. The first recording of their interactions from 2021 was mainly in Japanese, thus I chose to use Japanese as means of communication in our first interview. While examining the recording, I had the impression that language choice could be a source of disagreement in their relationship and therefore addressed this assumption in our interview.

The following extracts are taken from the online interview I had with Katharina and Takashi in summer 2021. I was at Katharina's home in Austria. We talked to Takashi using a platform for digital conferencing. They were used to talking online at this point, their habitual dialogic interactions were expanded through my presence.

Extract 5.1: Hotondo eego shaberu ne

0238	Florian:	ii: des~~u~~ ne. ja, [f~~u~~tari de hanash~~i~~teru toki wa daitai *Goo:d. So, when the two of you are talking, mostly*
0239	Takashi:	[(hai.) ~~u~~n. *Yes. Hm.*
0240	Florian:	((1,2)) eego ka [nihongo] *English or Japanese*
0241	Katharina:	[°~ee-~°] ~~u~~:. daitai eego da ne. ((0,6)) *°~ee-~° hmmm. Mostly English.*
0242		<atashi wa> nanka nihongo shaberu toki ch~~o~~tto hazukashii kara, *It's a bit awkward <for me> when I talk in Japanese,*
0243		de, takashi no eego sugoku umai kara. ((0,4)) *and, because Takashi's English is extremely good,*
0244		°hotondo° (.) eego shaberu ne. *we're °mostly° talking in English.*
0245		((0,7))
0246	Takashi:	~~u~~n:. ((1,4)) *Yeah.*

I (in the role of an interviewer) ask them which language they usually use when talking (line 0238). I draw a strict separation between English and Japanese (line 0240). This distinction is based on my prior knowledge about their communicative practices. At the same time, I create two distinct options from which they are asked to choose in the interview setting and do not give switching or mixing of languages in any form as an option. Katharina quickly produces an answer in an overlapping sequence (line 0241) and states that they mostly use English. After a short pause, she also gives reasons for this choice. She says that it would be a bit 'awkward' (*hazukashii*) for her to use Japanese (line 0242). She here refers to her emotional experience of using the language with her husband. In the following turn, she praises her husband's competence in English (*sugoku umai* 'very good,' line 0243) as another reason why

they prefer English. At the same time, it appears that she takes her English proficiency for granted. Appraisal is a characterization of his competence. Perhaps based on their experience in interaction, she knows that she is able to communicate with her partner in English. She presents emotions experienced in use as well as their respective communicative competences as reasons for their choice. After a short pause, Takashi registers her statement (line 0246).

A remark on the semantics of *hazukashii* ('awkward') is in order here, as it can also be translated as 'embarrassing' or 'shameful.' My interpretation of this segment is that Katharina does not feel embarrassed or ashamed when using Japanese. She hedges the intensity of the feeling with *chotto* 'a bit' (same line 0242). Thus, I opted for 'awkward' which rather describes her stance toward the interactional context-bound discomfort of using Japanese with her husband. *Nihonjinron* discourses suggest that *shame* ('haji') is a motivator for Japanese behavior (see, for example, Takada 2019; refer also to 2.2 in this thesis). In interaction, *hazukashii* is used to evaluate someone who "does not perform appropriate actions in relation to given social norms" (Takada 2019: 12). It is possible that Katharina uses *hazukashii* as self-evaluation to transmit her alignment with interactional preference for self-deprecation in Japanese discourse (Burch 2017). *Hazukashii* reflects an incorporated ideology of presenting self-consciousness to the other. By using this expression, she might want to shield herself from being criticized for normatively inappropriate or incorrect Japanese.

She justifies English as means of communication in their relationship. She positions herself as self-conscious about her Japanese competence, while praising her partner's English competence. In the subsequent turns, language choice is further discussed.

Extract 5.2: Nihongo no jikan

0247	Katharina:	<nihongo:: wa,> ama[ri:
		Not so much <Japanese>
0248	Takashi:	[nihongo wa, demo ne tabun °ne° chotto koo
0249		nihongo <shaberanai> to ish~~i~~ki shinai to ne, [ore shaberanai °(to)°
		Japanese, but yeah, like, we have to <talk> in Japanese, we have to be conscious about it, I (have to) talk
0250	Katharina:	[soo
		Yes
0251		((0,9))
0252	Florian:	[~~u~~n::°:.°

Hmmm°m°.

((lines omitted))

0267 Takashi: °da°kara moo chotto teekiteki ni (.)
0268 nihongo no jikan o ne tsukuttara ii ka na °°tte omotte.°°
°So,° °°I think°° it would be good to, you know, make time for Japanese more regularly.

0269 Katharina: un:: [soo ne. futsuu wa eego shaberu toki ni mo nanka
Yeah. Right. Usually, when we talk in English,

0270 Florian: [un:.
Yes.

0271 Katharina: tokidoki nihongo no kotoba kore tsukatteru n da kedo,
we sometimes use Japanese words like that,

0272 hontoo ni sono ((0,3)) sanjuppun zu::t[to nihongo shaberu no wa
but to talk enti::rely (0.3) in Japanese for 30 minutes

0273 Florian: [u:n::.
Hmmmm.

0274 Katharina: mechakucha (.) mezurashii to °omou.°
is totally rare, °I think.°

0275 Florian: naru[hodo
I see.

0276 Takashi: [un: [un.
Yeah. Yeah.

0277 Katharina: [ne.
Right.

0278 Takashi: un. mezurashii.
Yes. It's rare.

Katharina says that they do not use so much Japanese (line 0247). In the following partly overlapping sequences, Takashi says that they should talk in Japanese and be conscious about it (lines 0248–0249). He then refers to himself, saying that he (*ore*, 'I') has to talk in Japanese (line 0249). He positions himself as someone that can be held accountable for using (more) Japanese with his partner. This move could also index his model role as an L1 user of Japanese. Even though not made explicit here, he could imagine and anticipate their future

living together in Japan in this move. As they are in the process of arranging for Katharina to relocate to Japan, using more Japanese could be interpreted as beneficial for her prospective life in Japan. Katharina agrees (line 0250).

After a few turns (lines omitted), he says that they should create some 'time for Japanese' (*nihongo no jikan*) more regularly (lines 0267–0268). Three interpretations are possible here. First, using more Japanese for communication in their relationship seems to be desired by both of them at this point. At the same time, 'time for Japanese' means creating a specific time slot for using it. It appears that Japanese needs extra allocation of time, making it into a marked and temporally restricted resource in comparison to English. Second, for him to say that they should use more Japanese could also alternatively be interpreted as a preferred move within this interview sequence, to mitigate potential discordance between expectations, i.e., desired and actual language choice. Third, another interpretation of preferentiality in this move could be that he is conscious talking to a researcher investigating L2 Japanese language and its users.

Katharina continues to reflect on their communication and says that they do sometimes insert Japanese words in English conversation (lines 0269 & 0271). The separation between English and Japanese as distinct choices for their communication is blurred by mixing Japanese words into English discourse. However, she also says that they rarely use Japanese in longer sequences, such as for 30 minutes (lines 0272 & 0274).[55] It is likely that the timeframe she gives here is influenced by my original research design. I suggested 20~30 minutes as length of the recordings of their private talk when instructing Katharina on this activity. I signal my understanding of this new information (line 0275). Takashi agrees (line 0276) and aligns with her as presenting longer stretches of Japanese in their talk as 'rare' (*mezurashii*, line 0278).

They evoke a temporal dimension when reflecting on their language choices, which leads me to further explore how they arrived at their current choice in the following sequences of the interview—notwithstanding the fact that their current choice is not as static as it might seem when looking at the examples presented here.

[55] Another possible interpretation could be that they rarely talk for 30 minutes to each other, regardless of language. This, however, is less likely, as they were video-calling several times per week at this time.

5.3.3 Retrospection

To trace changes in their understanding of language choice, I asked which language they used when they first met in the ensuing sequence.

Extract 5.3: Saisho wa nihongo

0280	Florian:	naruhodo. ja saisho atta toki wa, ((0,6)) [eego datta n desu ka. *I see. So when you first met, was it English?*
0281	Takashi:	[°un.° *Yeah.*
0282	Katharina:	a ↑saishoo ↑↑wa::.↓ nihongo $ka na.$ (.) *Oh ↑↑first …↓ it was Japanese, $I guess.$*
0283		nanka, atta toki [wa nihongo *Like, when we met it was Japanese.*
0284	Takashi:	[amma oboetenai *I don't really remember.*
0285	Katharina:	((0,5)) ne-. at: atta toki ni wa sono tsuuyaku ibento jan. *Ne-. It was that interpreting event when we m- met.*
0286	Takashi:	((0,7)) un. *Yeah.*
0287	Florian:	((0.6)) [un:. *Hmm.*
0288	Katharina:	[soo:: (nanka) nihon de au toki ni kekkoo nihongo shabetta to omou.= *Yes. Like, when we were meeting in Japan, we talked a lot in Japanese I think.*
0289		=chigau? ((0,5)) eego datta no? *Not? Was it English?*
0290	Takashi:	((1,8)) eego d- ya::, wakann- *English d- nooo, I dunno-*
0291		saisho sug:oi saisho wa nihongo dake datta kamoshinnai kedo, *At the beginning, at the ve:ry beginning, maybe it was only Japanese,*
0292		dandan eego ni nat:ta ki ga suru na. [de ato wa ne:, *but I think then it gradually turn:ed into English. [And also:,*

0293	Florian:		[°ʉn::.° *Hmmm.*
0294	Katharina:		[nanka nihon-
0295		[atashi wa zettai nihongo shabetakatta kara: tabu[n: *So in Japan- becau:se I definitely wanted to talk in Japanese, maybe:*	
0296	Takashi:	[ʉn. *Yeah.*	[ʉn, *Yeah.*
0297	Katharina:	<(saisho wa ne) nihongo o shabetta to omou.> *<(at the beginning), we talked in Japanese.>*	
0298	Takashi:	ʉn:, *Yeah.*	
0299	Katharina:	oosʉtoria ni i[keru ( ) ni:. *To go to Austria,*	
0300	Takashi:	[ʉn. *Yes.*	
0301	Katharina:	no ato de: eego shabetta °to omou (yo).° *after ((I went to Austria)), °I think° we talked in English.*	

I ask whether they used English when they first met (line 0280). This question aims at reconstructing their decision-making process. Katharina is wondering whether they first used Japanese. Her question, directed at herself, is emphasized with an intonational curve and rising pitch (line 0282). She also refers to the interpreting event at which they first met. Here, their personal encounter is connected to language choice. The space of the narrated event shifts from their current separate digital spaces due to their long-distance relationship, to a shared space, Tokyo, where they first met. I initiated this shift by asking them explicitly about the past. Takashi is unsure about her recount and says that he does not remember (line 0284). He expresses uncertainty about his previous account that they used English right from the start.[56] Katharina reminds him of where they met (at an interpreting event in Tokyo), which she makes relevant in terms of language configuration. He confirms (line 0286), and I produce a continuer (line 0287). Katharina says that she thinks that they used more Japanese

[56] Of course, we cannot be certain about the interpretation of his degree of certainty here (see also Wittgenstein 1970 on this issue).

when they were meeting in Japan (line 0288), but immediately mitigates her statement and directs a question at him, asking whether it was English (line 0289). This shift reduces investment in her stance. After a short pause, Takashi produces some false starts in his turn (line 0290), indexing uncertainty about their language choice at the beginning. Straightforwardly claiming that they used English from the start might be dispreferred in this interview context, because it would challenge Katharina's statement that they first used Japanese. With limited investment in his stance, he says that they might have used Japanese at the 'very beginning,' which he emphasizes prosodically (*sug:oi shaisho*, line 0291). He also uses an expression of uncertainty, 'maybe' (*kamo shinnai*, line 0291). Even though this move may create alignment between their two epistemic stances, he affirms his claim that English was prominent from the start of their encounter. He presents a gradual shift from Japanese, the language they used when they started to go out, toward English that swiftly became the preferred choice in their relationship (line 0292).

Takashi wants to add to his prior utterance, but his turn overlaps with Katharina, who adds that she definitely wanted to use Japanese while in Japan (line 0295). Because of that, she claims, they used Japanese in the beginning (lines 0295–0297). To practice her Japanese was one of the reasons for her to study abroad in Tokyo. This utterance supports her claim that they used Japanese when they first met. She recounts that they used English after she moved back to Austria (lines 0299 & 0301), while he stayed in Japan. In this example, languages are arranged into *spacetimes* (Agha 2007b). In this reconstructed, narrated segment, Japanese is mainly used in Japan, and English transnationally and virtually. Regardless of the actual proportions of Japanese and English at the beginning of their relationship, we can interpret the stances and alignments they perform in this interview. The aim here is not to give an accurate or factual account of language alternation at the time of the narrated event, but what these stances can tell us about their understanding of language choice in the narrating event. Retrospection serves as a lens to make sense of the present. Katharina recounts how they used Japanese when they started to go on dates. Japanese represents a possible option, as they could take up using it in their daily communication again. Takashi acknowledges that they could make some time for Japanese (Extract 5.2), but diverges from Katharina's stance when he says that they used English throughout their relationship. He continues to underline the dominance of English in their communication in the following example.

Extract 5.4: Mawari no hito

0302	Takashi:	e: demo watashi wa tabun nihon de nihongo shabetteru to minna:
0303		nani yutteru ga kikoechau tte wakaru no iya datta kara
		But, because I hated that everybody would be able to hear what we're saying when talking in Japanese in Japan,
0304		katarina to shaberu toki waza to eego shabe>tteta< ki ka suru.
		I think talk>>ed<< in English on purpose when talking to Katharina.
0305		densha no no naka toka de.
		Like on the train.
0306	Florian:	[a: soo.
		Ah, right.
0307	Takashi:	[(demo) ((0,6))
		(But)
0308	Katharina:	un:: sore aru ne re[sutoran toka
		Yeahhh that has happened, like at a restaurant.
0309	Takashi:	[un:. [sososo.
		Yes. *Right!*
0310	Florian:	[un.
		Hm.
0311	Katharina:	sore wa:: tashika ni. eego shabetta yo ne.
		Ye::s, certainly we were talking in English in that case.
0312		((0,5))
0313	Takashi:	un::. ((0,6))
		Hmmm.
0314	Florian:	mawari no hito ga (.) sono ((0,5)) ano kiku [no wa
		When people around you, you know, like, listen
0315	Takashi:	[wakann- ((0,5)) un:.
		Dunno *yeah.*
0316	Florian:	((0,6)) ano, amari $suki ja nai desu ka,$
		Like, $you don't like it$ so much?
0317	Takashi:	((0,4)) amari suki ja nai desu. ((laughs)) .hh chotto
		I don't like it so much. *A bit.*
0318	Florian:	[wakarimasu.

I understand.

0319 Katharina: [$ato wa nanka:$ em::, wakaranai toki ni nanttoyu em: ((1,1))
$Also, like,$ ehmmm, when ((they)) don't understand, how do you say, ehm

0320 °sono:° hito ni tsuite shabereru.
you can talk about °that° person.

Takashi wants to affirm his claim that they also used English while being together in Japan. He gives a reason, i.e., he does not want other people to understand what they were talking, for example, on the train (lines 0302-0305). Katharina confirms and extends the spaces where they used English to restaurants (line 0308).

I take up this statement and check again that he does not like to be overheard by other people in public spaces. I smile while asking (line 0316), as I found his self-consciousness about his surroundings when talking to Katharina interesting. Takashi confirms by repeating my utterance (0317). I say 'I understand' (*wakarimasu*) to convey a shared stance (line 0318). I mean here that I would use such a move to code-switch to shield my talk from being overheard, too.

It appears that language choice is also guided by a distinction between domains, i.e., talk in private at home and in public spaces. Domains may thus lead speakers to enact specific language choice patterns. Katharina and Takashi's underlying assumption is that many people in Japan would not understand enough English to follow their talk. Takashi positions himself as self-conscious with regard to participation framework or audience. He wants to avoid being potentially overheard by others. At the same time, (a switch to) English is presented as a *resource of privacy*, as a code in couple communication. This privacy can also be used to talk about other people, as Katharina says (line 0320). Using English in such contexts also functions as a way to align with a social persona, as they position themselves as "competent English users" in Japan.[57] Performing English (as a Japanese person) in a public space that might be populated with mainly Japanese speakers is a strategy to distance oneself from others and portray an "international image." A high competence in English is perceived

[57] Note how this shared persona is not just linked with spaces and times, but emerges exactly out of the configuration of signs that build a nexus of spacetimes in which personae are located (Agha 2007b). This means that cultural models of people are construable only in their spacetime context. The competent (migrant) user of English is thus a persona set in the country of Japan in times of globalization (see, for example, Iino 2010; Seargeant 2009).

to be an index of internationality in Japan (see, e.g., Seargeant 2009 on ideologies of English in Japan). Using ELF to create privacy also questions received notions of ELF as a resource for communicative inclusion. After the last turn (line 0320), the screen freezes and we turn to solving the issue.

By reconstructing their narrated language choice, we see that their encounter started off in Japan using Japanese. English gained growing importance as a resource to establish privacy and enact couplehood while in Japan. English is presented in the first interview as the favored option for communicating. This now enregistered choice emerges as entextualized stance in the narrating event of the interview. However, Japanese remains an option that can and could be taken up again, for example, when they reconnect in Japan.

I proceeded the investigation of their language use after Katharina moved to Japan.

5.3.4 Understanding

After moving to Osaka in fall 2021, Katharina and Takashi settled in an apartment and gave me insight into their communicative routines half a year later. I was curious to see if any changes in their language choice might have occurred. Katharina wanted to use more Japanese, since her opportunities to use the language were limited in her first months after arrival. She was still looking for a job and had few social relations in Osaka apart from her partner. They recorded two conversations in Japanese for me. In the following extract, taken from a conversation they had in May 2022 at their home, they use Japanese. They knew that my initial interest was in conversations held in Japanese and Katharina showed effort improving and using the language. However, language choice between English and Japanese emerges as a contested issue in their communicative routines. The following interaction caught my interest in Katharina and Takashi's reflection on their language choice, as choice seemed to be subject to ongoing negotiation.

Extract 5.5: Saikin eego bakkari

034	Katharina:	demo: saikin eego bakkari shaberu kara moo:, *Bu:t recently, we only talk in English,*
035	Takashi:	[soo da ne.] *Yeah.*
036	Katharina:	[nihongo] ↑wasurechau yo: atashi↓=

so ↑I'm forge:tting my↓ Japanese!

037	Takashi:	=[(gomen) gomen ne. *(Sorry) I'm sorry.*
038	Katharina:	[((chuckles))

Katharina says that they recently only use English when talking (line 34). Takashi agrees (line 35), overlapping with Katharina's complaint in lines 35–36. She says that would be forgetting her Japanese. This is emphasized through a high-down intonational curve framing 'I forget' (*wasurechau*), which indexes an affective stance (Ochs 1996) toward her competence. The interactional particle *yo* invites a response from Takashi, an explicit *registration* of her utterance in order to progress the talk (Morita 2012b). She explicitly marks forgetting Japanese as a problem. Takashi apologizes (line 37). With this apologetic expression, he first takes responsibility, and second, builds a deontic stance—they indeed *should* use more Japanese. His apology overlaps with Katharina's chuckling (line 38). Chuckling here diminishes investment in her previous stance, mitigating the intensity of her claim.

This short exchange reveals that Katharina and Takashi contest the determination of their language choices.[58] On the one hand, they can use Japanese affirmatively to talk about their language choices. On the other hand, English seems to be the dominant language in their communication after Katharina moved to Osaka. She perceives this as an index for a decline in her Japanese competence. Her affective stance points to a fear of losing her Japanese abilities if they continue to use only English. The fact that Takashi apologizes indicates that he acknowledges accountability for Katharina's alleged decline in her Japanese competence. He takes her utterance as an insinuation for which he feels the need to apologize. He commits to epistemic status, as he, being an L1 user of Japanese, would also have Japanese in his repertoire available to communicate with his wife. But he seems to prefer English, and one reason for that will be discussed in the next extract.

Discussions about language choices repeatedly surface in their interactions. English and Japanese are available as resources, but English continues to be the dominant code. However, Katharina now expresses discomfort with this configuration. In the same conversation, they give reasons why they shifted to English.

[58] In this example, as in the interview examples before, Takashi and Katharina *perform* and *evaluate* Japanese in the metapragmatic stancetaking model (Spitzmüller 2022a); their codes are in synch.

Extract 5.6: Rikai

090	Katharina:	watashi motto motto, nihongo shabetai n da kedo[:
		I want to speak more, more Japanese,
091	Takashi:	[hai.
		Yes.
092	Katharina:	demo shaberu toki,
		but when we talk,
093	Takashi:	~~u~~n.
		Yeah.
094	Katharina:	takashi wa tokidoki rikai dekinai k- >watashi no nihongo< rikai dekinai (.) nai?
		you sometimes can't understand, you can't understand >my Japanese<. Not?
095	Takashi:	nai toki ga aru ne.
		Yes, sometimes I don't understand.
096	Katharina:	metcha aru. [de] sore sugoku,
		It happens a lot. And (because) that is so
097	Takashi:	[~~u~~n.] ~~u~~n.
		Yeah. *Yeah.*
098	Katharina:	mendook~~u~~sai kara [nanka wakkanai.
		annoying, *I dunno.*
099	Takashi:	[~~u~~n.
		Yeah.
100		otagai [ne.
		For both of us, right.
101	Katharina:	[saikin:, °>eego ts~~u~~katta hoo ga ii kana [tte omotteta.<°
		Recently, °>I thought it might be better to use English.<°
102	Takashi:	[hm.
103		otagai, (.) mendook~~u~~sai tte omotte=tabun katarina wa iitai koto ga umaku ienak~~u~~te,
		for both of us, it's bothersome, I think.=Maybe you can't express yourself as you want,
104		((1,7))
105	Katharina:	hm.

106	Takashi:	nihongo de, *in Japanese.*
107	Katharina:	[hm.
108	Takashi:	[de ore wa katarina no nihongo wakannai toki ga ooi (.) kara, *And because I (.) often don't understand your Japanese,*
109		((1,6))
110	Takashi:	sore mendookusaku natchatta.= *it became a hassle.*

Katharina says that she wants to use more Japanese (line 90) with her husband, but it seems that Takashi sometimes cannot understand her when they talk (line 94). He acknowledges that it sometimes happens (line 95). She emphasizes her statement by saying that 'it happens a lot' (*metcha aru*, line 96). She then goes on and explains that this is bothering her (line 98). Takashi agrees again and starts his turn by saying it is the same for both of them (line 100). But Katharina takes over the floor and adds that, because communicating in Japanese seems to be bothersome, she started to think that it would be better to use English (line 101). She opts for the choice that is less troublesome. Takashi then repeats 'for both of us' (*otagai*) and rationalizes their choice by directing attention to the issue of communicative competence. He takes up her expression, 'bothersome' (*mendookusai*), and compares both their competences. He claims that Katharina cannot sufficiently express herself in Japanese (line 103), and that he often has trouble understanding what she is trying to convey (line 108). Katharina registers his statement, but perhaps does not agree, indicated through the pause (line 104) and the short 'hm' (line 105). Takashi then adds 'in Japanese' (line 106) to emphasize that expressing herself in Japanese might be challenging, in contrast to expressing herself in English. He identifies the reason for their difficulties in communicating in Japanese with respect to her alleged insufficient knowledge of the language. At the same time, he aligns with her by conceding that their communication sometimes does not work because it is *him* who cannot understand her Japanese (line 108). It seems, though, that he still puts the main blame on her and insufficient competence to convey herself in Japanese.

The issue of understanding they discuss here exhibits parallelism and resonance across turns, as they take up segments of a prior turn in constructing a next turn. Example 5.1 illustrates this interactive sequence in segments. The repeated elements primarily include negation markers (column B), from Katharina's repeated *rikai dekinai* ('cannot understand'),

to Takashi's *nai toki ga aru* ('I sometimes don't understand'). The *aru* ('to be') is taken up by Katharina in the subsequent turn and emphasized: *metcha aru* ('it happens a lot'). This expression of frequency (column C) is later recycled by Takashi (see line 108, *wakannai toki ga ooi*, 'I often don't understand'). Column E is reserved for the key indexical expression 'annoying' (*mendookusai*). Again, Katharina uses this adjective (line 096b) and Takashi immediately takes it up in his turn (line 103a). He then goes back to repeat negations (*ienakute*, '[you] cannot say') and concludes this segment with the result 'it became annoying' (*mendookusaku natchatta*). This metrical structure shows how issues in understanding and using Japanese is poetically configured in their interaction. While they claim that using Japanese is accompanied by trouble, their performance shows a high degree of resonance across turns here (Du Bois 2014). This example vividly illustrates that understanding is co-constructed in a dynamic back-and-forth of turns that take up elements from antecedent turns.

Example 5.1. Resonant parallelism in Katharina and Takashi's interaction

Segment:		**A**	**B**	**C**		**D**	**E**	**F**
			Negation	**Frequency**			***annoying***	
094a	KA:	takashi wa tokidoki rikai	dek**inai**					
b		>watashi no nihongo< rikai	dek**inai**					
c		(.)	**nai**?					
095	TA:		**nai**	toki ga	**aru** ne.			
096a	KA:			metcha	**aru**.			
b		de				sore sugoku	**mendooku~~u~~sai**	kara
103a	TA:					otagai, (.)	**mendooku~~u~~sai**	
b		[…] iitai koto ga umaku	ie**nak~~u~~te**,					
108		ore wa katarina no nihongo	wakan**nai**	toki ga	ooi (.)			kara,
110						sore	**mendooku~~u~~saku**	natchatta.

Several observations can be made from this segment. Although Katharina and Takashi use Japanese in this conversation, imbalanced competences on both sides that they experienced in prior interactions seem to discourage them from making use of it in their daily conversations. Understanding each other is implied to be essential for a couple's communication. They evaluate competence through the lens of 'understanding' (*rikai*) and *expressibility* (*iitai koto o ienakute* 'cannot say what you want to say'), which is "one of the basic tenets of pragmatics" (Hübler & Bublitz 2007: 9). Expressibility functions as a metapragmatic anchor for comparing competences. Competence in understanding the other and expressing

oneself in Japanese are co-constructed in their interaction and addressed in explicit metapragmatic discourse. Insufficient willingness to understand and inability to make oneself understood are sources for potential discordance in interaction.

Although both identify communicating in Japanese as troublesome, they do not dismiss use of this resource altogether, as becomes evident from the fact that they are using it in this and prior contexts, though partly on my request. In this exchange, using Japanese to talk about communicating in Japanese flows without trouble. They take an affirmative stance toward Japanese in interaction by performing its use. Japanese as well as English are shared in their repertoires, but the reasons why they chose to use mainly English seem to be complex. We can also see here that competence in a language goes beyond morphosyntactic and pragmatic levels.

5.3.5 Transgressing spheres

I further explored their reflections on language choice in our second interview, conducted in September 2022. At this point, they were living together for almost a year. They just moved to a new apartment in August in the same year. I took the segment from their recorded conversation where they discuss difficulties in communicating in Japanese as a base for understanding how their choices could have changed. In the interview, I explicitly asked them about their choices.

Extract 5.7: After two, three minutes we switch to English

604	Florian:	ehm which language do you use (.) right now (.)
605		usually at home (.) when talking to each other.
606	Katharina:	english.
607	Florian:	[it's just english?]
608	Takashi:	[mhm.] mhm.
609	Florian:	((1,3)) and you usually don't use any other languages?
610		(.) in y- in your daily life?
611	Takashi:	i think when you come back from outside,=
612		=when she hangs out with eh: her japanese friends or
613	Florian:	[mhm.
614	Takashi:	[yeah like w-
615	Katharina	worki[ng
616	Takashi:	[from work,

617	Florian:	mhm.
618	Takashi:	ehm (.) <she comes back to me an- sp- and speaks in Japanese.>
619	Florian:	okay. =
620	Takashi:	=i noticed that tendency recently,
621	Katharina:	hm.
622	Takashi:	but then,
623	Objects:	((sound of message on phone))
624	Takashi:	((0,7)) after:, ((0,4)) @two@ $three minutes we switch to english.$
625	Katharina:	[because i get a:: english reply,]
626	Florian:	[okay.] okay,
627	Katharina:	so i- it's always like it [(fi-)
628	Takashi:	[no:. i- i sometimes try to reply
629	Katharina:	[sometimes]
630	Florian:	[( )] ya.
631	Katharina:	ya. but s- sometimes it's true. and sometimes i really:: think
632		okay for the next five minutes i try to stay in japanese, ((0,7))
633		but then sometimes your replies are getting more english
634		and then i, ((0,4)) also switch to english °again.°
635		((0,8))

I ask them about their language use at home (line 604–605). Katharina gives a short reply. As I spent some time with them before the interview and noticed a few stretches of talk in Japanese, I wanted to follow up on this answer. I therefore challenge her reply by questioning whether they would not use other languages (lines 607, 609–610). Takashi starts to talk about Katharina's language use, also addressing her directly with "you." Apparently, she sometimes talks in Japanese to him when coming back home from work or after meeting with Japanese-speaking friends (lines 611–620). Takashi deictically shifts from "you," addressing Katharina directly, toward "she" (lines 611–612). Through this shift, he delineates more clearly the narrated event and a narrated Katharina. This move instantiates the participation framework of the interview, as he addresses his descriptions of her actions to me by shifting from second person to third person pronouns. A narrated Katharina emerges in his story while a narrating Katharina is present in the interview. The couple evokes two time-spaces that influence language use, an outside space where Katharina uses Japanese when meeting friends. And a private space at home where use of Japanese appears to be marked for Takashi. He also makes graduality relevant again, when he says that he "noticed that tendency recently" (line 620).

Language choice is not settled but transitory. Temporality is also repeatedly made relevant in discussing choices in the next turns.

Takashi explains that they switch to English after a few minutes of talking in Japanese (line 624). I register this statement, overlapping with Katharina who gives a reason for switching. She says that she gets a reply in English (line 625). Takashi seems to be the one who initiates this switch. Katharina then starts with "it's always like" (line 627), but is interrupted by Takashi who negates ("no") and mitigates ("sometimes") her statement (line 628). He claims that he sometimes tries to reply in Japanese. Katharina takes up his "sometimes," overlapping with an unintelligible utterance by me (line 630). My "ya" is taken up by Katharina (line 631). "Ya" here is phonetically similar to the German *ja* 'yes.' It could be a trace of German-influenced English, but it is also a form that transgresses boundaries of languages. It could be interpreted as the beginning of an emerging entextualized alignment between Katharina and me, as we continue to use "ya" in the following sequences (see the next extract).

In a metrical organization of adverbs of frequency, Katharina's "always" (line 627) contrasts with Takashi's "sometimes." Katharina uses parallelism that is footed on "sometimes" in the subsequent turns. In the following sequence, she repeats "sometimes" three times (lines 631 & 633), using this expression to corroborate her claim. She gradually builds an interactionally contrasting stance toward Takashi. In the narrated event, she tries to continue using Japanese. However, she then switches to English, the unmarked choice at this point, because Takashi refuses to use Japanese and increases his English replies. This scene is framed with reported thought ("i really:: think" in line 631). Katharina is thinking out loud. Narrators use reported thoughts to highlight their deliberation about narrated events, often expressing a clash of initial expectation and actual outcome or realization of what happened in a past event (Jefferson 2004a).

This example also indexes her effort to use Japanese. Japanese speakers switching to English in interactions with L2 users of Japanese has been reported as *linguistic microaggression* that can deprive L2 users of speaker legitimacy (Takeuchi 2023a, 2025). Within this interaction, such a shift removes power from Katharina through *illegitimation* (Bucholtz & Hall 2004: 387). The underlying ideology endows so-called native speakers of Japanese with language ownership and power to determine language choices. What is important in this case is the fact that he seems to enforce his *choice*, rather than his L1 Japanese.

This sequence makes discordance with respect to language choice visible. Katharina perceives Takashi's switch to English as disalignment that prompts her to switch to English, too. This switch to one shared language reinstalls alignment on the level of language choice (line 634) and indexes an affirmative stance toward English. Takashi's use of English in the narrated scenes when she comes back home could be an attempt to encourage mixing languages, but it seems that generally conversation in *one* language is preferred. His English replies force use of English upon her.

Without further questions from my side, Katharina and Takashi continue to reflect on the reasons why they switch to English.

Extract 5.8: Inserting Japanese words

636	Takashi:	okay. why do we do that?
637	Katharina:	((0,9)) ↑i don't know.
638		because english is ( ) more comfortable like
639		[easier [it's] just easier.
640	Takashi:	[easier. (easier).
641	Florian:	[ya.]
642	Takashi:	ya.=
643	Katharina:	=because i am lazy at least ((laughs)) @(maybe)@
644		.hh $(stay in)$ japanese more.
645		but ya i think ehm:, <even if we talk in english,> ((0,4))
646		<just like certain words sometimes we use> in japanese you know.
647	Florian:	okay. ya.
648		((1,1))
649	Katharina:	like
650		((0,7))
651	Takashi:	.hh whatever pops up to: our mind first,
652	Florian:	[mhm.
653	Takashi:	[japanese or english maybe: you know
654		in her case sometimes german.
655	Florian:	mhm.
656	Katharina:	<ya:..> ((0,5)) but just like ((1,2)) >i don't know< if if you have like
657		if you're cooking, i would never say soya sauce.
658		it's always like shooyu. like. (.) you know this
		((lines omitted)
667	Florian:	so you would just sometimes insert japanese words when
668	Katharina:	[ins- ya:: yayaya.

669	Florian:	[(speaking english)
670		mhm. ((1,3)) okay. ((1,0))
671	Katharina:	right?
672	Takashi:	ya.=
673	Katharina:	=[i think so
674	Florian:	=[°°hm.°°
675	Katharina:	((laughs)) [.HHHH
676	Florian:	[mhm.
677	Katharina:	so like it's not *ral*<one hundred percent english:.>
678		((0,6)) just mixed. ((0,5)) some[times
679	Takashi:	[yeah i'd say like ninety ((1,0)) eight percent english.
680	Katharina:	[ya: ya.
681	Takashi:	[(and) two percent japanese.
682	Florian:	((1,0)) okay.

Takashi addresses Katharina and himself with a question (line 636). It seems that he expects an answer from her, putting her in the position to explain why they "give up" using Japanese after a few turns and switch to English. Katharina starts to think out loud (line 637) and gives reason for why English could be favored. She says that English would be "more comfortable" (line 638) and they both produce "easier" (lines 639 & 640) in overlapping turns. They align in their view that using English together is accompanied by less struggle in contrast to Japanese. This confirms Ikeda & Bysouth's (2013: 49) observation that English in lingua franca contexts is often regarded as "a 'troubleless' communication medium" in contrast to Japanese. Katharina and Takashi perceive conversing in Japanese as a challenge. I register these two aspects of narrated and perceived communicative competence (line 641). It is also possible that they produce this answer as a preferred move in the interview context, as they might feel held accountable by me for giving reasons why they use English and not Japanese.

Takashi also uses "ya" (line 642), furthering the entextualization of this communicative resource. After Takashi's "ya," Katharina takes a stance of self-deprecation again by putting blame on her communicative behavior when it comes to talking in Japanese. She describes herself as too "lazy" to stay in Japanese (line 643), although she does show effort in creating opportunities to use the language with her partner. This stance of self-deprecation is accompanied by laughter. L2 users of Japanese take stances of self-deprecation "to make [their] situated identity as an L2 speaker relevant" (Burch 2017: 40). This echoes Japanese

(language education) ideologies that value self-effacement. Such ideologies advise learners to refrain from boasting about one's communicative competence (Heinrich 2005: 219). Katharina takes these stances to display a rationalization for their aborting attempts to use Japanese, possibly a connection to her "laziness" in using Japanese and alleged lack of competence, due to being an L2 user of the language. In the interview setting, self-deprecation works as a way to fulfil the need to produce an answer to the overarching question of their language choice. On the interactional level, it also shows *enactment* of their couplehood by accommodating to her partner, who seems to prefer English with her. We can detect nascent discordance here, because accommodation appears to be asymmetric. Takashi admits having trouble in understanding Katharina when talking in Japanese, even though they can have conversations in Japanese without many breakdowns. What is more, he is the initiator for switching to English, denying Katharina's attempt to use Japanese with him. This communicative imbalance might be the outcome of rooted gender imbalances that figure in couple talk. For the Japanese case, Itakura & Tsui (2004: 245) have shown that "[m]ales played a central role in shaping the development of the conversation," while females tend to contribute to a male party's conversational dominance. Another interpretation could be that Takashi is not used to non-native varieties of Japanese and thus suggests English where the idea of nativeness could be less of an issue for them.

In line 644, Katharina reflects that she could "stay in Japanese more." In this move, she challenges her partner, as it is him who starts switching into English gradually. To keep using Japanese would be a way to resist his communicative dominance. She takes both accommodating and disaffiliative stances toward communicating with her partner. By persisting in using Japanese, she can claim legitimacy as L2 user of Japanese (Takeuchi 2023b). She exhibits a claim for legitimacy and performance of competence in Japanese in the subsequent turns. She says that even in English, they would sometimes insert Japanese words. This utterance is at a slower pace that indicates deliberation (lines 645–646). Takashi, in a move of possible alignment, says that they would choose the words that first spring to their mind when talking (line 651). This, again, can be interpreted as a move in direction of alternating or mixing languages in talk, but his unaccommodating stance when using Japanese with Katharina makes such an interpretation less plausible. However, he presents their relationship as multilingual, when explicitly referring to the languages they can use (line 653), but attributing German to Katharina's repertoire (line 654). Katharina adds to this interpretation. For some words, she prefers the Japanese words (*shooyu*) over the English or

German equivalents "soya sauce" ('soy sauce'). She refers to cooking, which they usually do at home, in a private space. In this move, she not only exhibits knowledge of certain lexemes in Japanese but tries to transport Japanese as a resource for couple talk inside the private sphere where English came to be the dominant language. Inserting words related to Japanese food in Japanese might be more available than, for example, complex morphosyntactic mixing of codes. Yet talk about food is also a frequent topic in couple conversation that allows for creating shared but hybrid identities (Gonçalves 2013a).

I paraphrase Katharina's explanations by providing terminology, "insert" (line 667), which Katharina approves (line 668). Using *shooyu* instead of 'soy sauce' is an example of transfer of Japanese words into English discourse. She seeks confirmation from Takashi with "right" in line 671 and "I think so" in line 673. She says that it is not entirely English when they talk in English (line 678). This stance favors a mix of Japanese and English. They show that their shared repertoires not only consist of English. Takashi agrees but adds that English has a higher percentage. Both give numbers that should represent percentages of using the respective languages. Takashi says it would be "ninety-eight percent English" and "two percent Japanese" (lines 679 & 681), which shows an overwhelming tendency toward English. Regardless of the actual portions of using these languages, this move clearly shows his preference toward communicating in English with his partner.[59]

The examples above show that language choice is ongoingly negotiated in their interactions after living together in Japan for a few months. Although English continues to be the preferred language, Katharina draws on her resources in Japanese, perhaps to make this language part of their communicative practices. One strategy is to take Japanese that she uses at her workplace and with friends inside their home when she talks in Japanese to Takashi. A more established practice seems to be insertion of certain Japanese lexemes into English. Takashi does acknowledge mixing languages, but pushes English as the dominant language of their conversations. At the time of this interview, they are living together in Japan. English might still be perceived as a resource of privacy in public spaces (Extract 5.4 in Section 5.3.3), but it thoroughly permeates their private sphere as well. This leaves Katharina with less opportunities to use Japanese. While communicating in Japanese does work, its use is marked and English is the "more comfortable" and "easier" choice for them. This is evidence

[59] Measuring frequency of languages in percentage reveals an interesting notion of the *concept of language*. Takashi perceives English and Japanese in this context as distinct and measurable entities.

of a conception of communicative competence that is strongly influenced by emotional dispositions toward contexts of use, rather than assessable knowledge or measurable proficiency of the language.

5.3.6 Making compromises

I conducted another interview in spring 2024 to see if any changes in Katharina and Takashi's language choice had occurred when they were living together for approximately 1.5 years. I ask them again which languages they use in their everyday communicative routines.

Extract 5.9: English wall

1	Takashi:	we sometimes use jap- in japanese.
2	Florian:	mhm.=
3	Takashi:	=there are some days she really wants to use just japanese,
4		((looking at her))
5	Florian:	mhm.
6	Katharina:	((2,0)) °hh° i usually give up quickly because i start talking in-
7		and the only thing: which is coming back is english,
8	Florian:	mhm.
9	Katharina:	and i don't like that when i talk and then,
10	Takashi:	[ya.
11	Katharina:	[if you reply in a different language it's just [like
12	Takashi:	[ya.
13	Florian:	<so you would prefer him to reply in- in japanese?>
14	Katharina:	yeah. i- i prefer conversation in one language.=
15		=but i think it's so weird if like one person: talks in th- one language
16		and the opposite talks in a different language?
17	Florian:	okay. [mhm.
18	Takashi:	[yeah. for sure.
19	Katharina:	>lik- like you talk in german and i keep talking in english,
20		this would be so weird?<
21	Florian:	okay. °mhm°
22	Katharina:	but if both of us talk in english or >both of us talk in german
23		[then it's okay.<]
24	Florian:	[↑hm::.] ya.
25	Katharina:	>i don't know.<=
26	Takashi:	=ya.
27	Katharina:	so:: that's why (.) even if i think, ↑ohh okay

28 Florian: [mhm.
29 Katharina: [↑today at work i talked a lot in japanese, i can actually keep going or
30 [i still] have it in my head.
31 Florian: [mhm.] okay. °ya.°=
32 Katharina: =and i come back home and i talk one or two sentences,
33 $and then it's just like english (.) !wall:!$ coming back it's like o~ka:y,~
34 i have to switch to english.
35 Florian: hm::. [okay.
36 Katharina: [ya. =
37 Takashi: =ya::. ((3,0)) yeah, that happens.
38 Florian: mhm
39 Takashi: ((1,0)) °that happens. yeah.°
40 Florian: okay. ((1,5))

Takashi says that they sometimes use Japanese, taking up the adverb of frequency "sometimes" that was used in our previous interviews about language choice (line 1). According to him, Katharina attempts to use more Japanese on some days (line 3). He also directs his gaze at her (line 4) to invite a reaction from her. Katharina says that she abandons the attempts to use the language, because Takashi replies in English (lines 6–7). "Giving up" here indicates that she desires to use more Japanese with him, but the efforts of using it are too high to keep going. She says that "and the only thing: which is coming back is english." It seems that Takashi does not reply to her in Japanese at all in this context (line 7). In contrast to the earlier interview, it appears that now his replies do not shift from Japanese to English when Katharina talks to him in Japanese, but that he entirely uses English with her. I register her statement (line 8). Katharina goes on to elaborate why she "gives up" using Japanese: she does not like being responded to in an alternate language from the one that she uses (lines 9 & 11). Takashi registers her utterance in an overlapping sequence (line 10).

Next, I ask if she would prefer him to reply in Japanese so they would stay in one language (line 13). The pace of my turn is slow, as I carefully move to the contentious topic of language choice to understand why they suspend using Japanese. Katharina explains to me that she prefers "conversation in one language" (line 14) and that it is "weird" when interactants in a dialogic situation would use different languages (lines 15–16). I register her explanation (line 17), as Takashi does (line 18). Katharina gives an example for this type of dispreferred language configuration and shifts toward me. She evaluates "like you talk in german and i keep talking in english" (line 19) as "so weird" (line 20) in a faster pace. I register this

explanation (line 21). She goes on and says that she can accept if we would both use German or English (lines 22–23). I show surprise with "hm" in a higher pitch. Katharina adheres to a configuration of languages that I call here *code coherence*, i.e., the idea that dialogic interaction should be conducted in one shared language. For her, the actual language may be less important than the fact that they would settle on a single language. However, the issue of power remains, because it is Takashi who pushes for English-only. Katharina could stick to her choice of keeping Japanese but decides to accommodate to him.

In her next turn, she mitigates her previous explanations with "I don't' know" to possibly diminish the impact of a proposed strict separation of languages (line 25). Takashi quickly registers this (line 26) and Katharina reconnects her ideas about language configurations to the reason why she "gives up" on using Japanese with her partner. She introduces her thoughts in the narrating event with direct reported thought, using "even if i think" (line 27) and the following thoughts in a higher pitch which frame her report (see, e.g., Günthner 2002). In this case, she cites herself. Reported thought again serves the function to contrast initial expectation (keep using Japanese) with actual outcome (switching to English). She describes a scene where she used Japanese at her workplace and feels comfortable to continue using it when she comes back home as she still has it in her head (lines 29-30). I produce the continuer "mhm" and backchannel "okay" (line 31) and Katharina proceeds to explain the situation at home in the following turn. Upon coming back home, she tries to continue using Japanese (line 32), but faces an "english (.) !wall:!" The metaphor "wall" for her partner's exclusive use of English accounts for an unsurmountable obstacle that she faces in interaction with him. Her desire to use Japanese with him is not met and her wish for code coherence prevents her from persistent use of Japanese while he would talk in English. She therefore feels forced to switch back to English (line 34). The creaky phonation in "okay" (line 33) is an indexical icon for her frustration (Thompson 2016: 37), as her efforts to hold a conversation in Japanese are not met by her partner. Takashi acknowledges that these situations occur (line 37 & 39).

I want to hear Takashi's view on the issue and asks about the reason why he does not want to use Japanese in this context.

Extract 5.10: One person has to compromise

41	Florian:	so you don't want to: use japanese (.) in that context?
42		[in that situation?
43	Takashi:	[som- som- sometimes i want to::, ((2,0))
44		i (want to) use japanese, i guess.

45		eh but most of the time since (.)
46		most of m- n- most of da::y eh my brain is set to english,=
47	Florian:	=mhm=
48	Takashi:	=and then (.) at night when she comes back i want to keep going=
49		=the same reason with her i guess.
50		she uses japanese at her workplace,
51		and her [brain is set to japanese.
52	Katharina:	[mhm
53	Takashi:	when she comes back she wants to keep that japanese brain,
54		but i [i- don't want to.
55	Katharina:	[just one- one person [has to compromise.
56	Takashi:	[ya.
57	Florian:	mhhm. .hh
58	Katharina:	[1 ((smiling, shows thumbs up))
59	Takashi:	[1 ya- b- but
60	Florian & Katharina:	[2 ((laughing))
61	Takashi:	[2 yeah that's true
62		yeah that's true. but eh when we started hanging out,
63		going out, dating,
64	Florian:	mhm.
65	Takashi:	everything was in english. so our default language is english=
66		=and i feel most comfortable talking with you: in english.
67		because it's our default. (.) and suddenly [switching-]
68	Katharina:	[for you.] ya.
69	Takashi:	at this point suddenly switching it to eh Japanese,
70		i feel like i'm talking with eh (.) ↑a little bit↓ different person=
71		=you know that °kind [of°
72	Florian:	[oh:: okay. [mhm.
73	Takashi:	[yeah, i feel.
74	Katharina:	for you.

I self-correct from "context" to "situation" (line 41–42), but Takashi quickly takes over the floor to explain that he sometimes wants to use Japanese with his wife (line 43). He uses the tag "i guess" (line 44), mitigating epistemic certainty. To bluntly admit that he does not want to use Japanese with Katharina could be perceived as impolite in the interview context. He then rationalizes why he continues to use English with her. In a longer stretch of talk, he explains that his "brain is set to english" (line 46), since he uses it at his workplace. After

coming home from work, he wants to continue using it when talking with Katharina (line 48). He projects his explanation why he wants to use English onto her (line 49). Since Katharina uses Japanese at work ("outside"), she "wants to keep that japanese brain" (line 53), according to him. Again, he addresses me by referring to her with "she," which highlights that he is talking about Katharina in a narrated event.

His projection—that they want to keep using the language from work—serves as construction of similarity and is his approach to enact couplehood. He says "i don't want to" (line 54), in an overlapping turn with Katharina, who says that one person has to make a compromise (line 55). I register this statement (line 57). In the next turn, Katharina smiles and shows a "thumbs up," and Takashi wants to start objecting her, introduced with "b- but" in line 59. Upon her gesture, Katharina and I start to laugh. On the one hand, laughter diminishes seriousness of the problem at hand. On the other hand, laughter is also a way to form alignment between us to oppose Takashi's stance. I emphasize with her, as I have a longer established relationship with Katharina, and I express awareness of the vulnerable subject position as someone navigating the Japanese linguistic sphere as an L2 user.

We can identify discordance between Katharina and Takashi that manifests in this segment of explicit metapragmatic discourse. The "one person" is herself, who has to make a compromise when she switches to English to adjust to Takashi's style. He wants to stay in English and does not want to switch to Japanese for her. To say that someone has to make a compromise explicitly shows that one side has to adjust their behavior in order to make communication successful. "Successful" for Katharina means communicating in one shared language. Katharina expresses frustration that her partner does not make efforts to understand her in Japanese and also fends off her attempts to use it together by sticking to English.

Takashi wants to defend his use of English by attending to their narrated interactional history. He admits that one person has to make a compromise (line 61–62), but shifts the scene to the time when they started going out (lines 62–63). He says that "everything was in english" (line 65) from the beginning of their encounter. This seems to be a reconstruction different from their previous account, where they admitted using at least a bit of Japanese at the beginning of their relationship (Extract 5.3 in Section 5.3.3). Therefore, he claims English to be their default language from start (lines 65 & 67). "Default" indexes normalcy or unmarkedness. He uses this expression with an inclusive "our." "Our default" presupposes a static configuration of language choice from the start of their relationship. For him, English

is also the "most comfortable" language to use with Katharina (line 66). Takashi's emotional engagement in this narration is emphasized through stress on the key expressions "default," "English," and "you." The expressions "default" and "English" index a configuration that Takashi makes relevant when talking about communicative practices in their relationship.

He goes on to talk about switching languages (line 67), but there's an overlap with Katharina's utterance "for you" (line 68). She disaligns with Takashi by explicitly attributing the stance of English as a default language to *him*. He goes on to explain that switching to Japanese at this point in their relationship would feel for him like talking to "↑a little bit↓ different person" (lines 69-70). Framed with an intonational contour, he describes that Katharina's persona would change when using Japanese. As he later reveals in the interview, this assumption is based on an ideology of personality change that happens when alternating languages. He espouses the idea that languages and identities have an inherent connection (cf. Coulmas 2013: 189–202). He adheres to discourses of bi- and multilingualism that multilingual subjects draw on to interpret and rationalize their perceived changes of the self in different languages (Pavlenko 2006).

I react to his explanation with slight surprise (line 72). And Katharina repeats "for you" (line 74), emphasizing disaffiliation with his stance. She would embrace Japanese as an addition, as a communicative resource that they could actively share alongside English. By explicitly presenting the "default language" English as *his* stance, she shows that for her, Japanese could still be considered an option for a couple language.

5.3.7 Cute German

Although Katharina and Takashi also share German in their repertoires, Takashi's competence in German is too low to make it into a resource to have conversations with his partner. However, they engage with German in interaction and thus make it a resource to establish couplehood. They display their ability to draw on German as a resource and thereby make their "hybrid" and multilingual identity salient in the interview setting. The following extract is taken from the interview in April 2024. We are talking about German, which they both included in their language portraits. I want to know if they use German with each other. Except for occasional use of *ya* in their discourse, I did not notice any use of German among them during the time we spent together.

Extract 5.11: Cute German words

1	Florian:	but you don't really use <german to each other right.> [not so,
2	Takashi:	[n::o:
3	Katharina:	[no. no.
4	Florian:	[mhm. °((chuckles))°
5	Katharina:	[just recently you sometimes you
6		<try to learn one or two words>=mainly [animals,
7	Florian:	[okay.
8	Katharina:	which is cute i think.
9	Takashi:	penguin.
10	Katharina:	( ) close.
11	Florian:	mhm. =
12	Takashi:	=schnecke.
13	Katharina:	mhm.
14	Florian:	ah: =
15	Takashi:	=oh:.
16	Katharina:	°ya.° and ↑maybe you just like the sound?
17	Takashi:	yeah yeah. i like the sound. =
18	Katharina:	=sound you like=
19	Takashi:	=ya. some words are really cute,
20	Florian:	mhm.=
21	Takashi:	=schnecke sounds really cute, f:rog what was it?
22	Katharina:	frosch.
23	Takashi:	frosch. °ya.°
24	Florian:	mhm.=
25	Takashi:	=cute.
26	Florian:	[((chuckles))
27	Katharina:	[((chuckles))
28	Florian:	((0,7)) [okay.
29	Katharina:	[so:: it's not because of the meaning but more because the word sounds cute.
30	Florian:	okay.
31	Katharina:	ya. ((0,4)) and also::=
32	Florian:	=mhm.=
33	Katharina:	=similar to english. °sometimes right.°
34	Takashi:	yeah.

In the first line, I put forward an assumption that they "don't really use <german" with each other. Both immediately answer "no" (lines 2-3). I register their answer (line 4). Katharina

then qualifies their response and says that he does want to learn words for animals in German (lines 5–6). She evaluates his playful engagement with German as "cute." This is expression is taken up in the following stretch, and they associate it with German words. Takashi produces "penguin" (line 9), which Katharina evaluates as "close" (line 10) to the German equivalent *Pinguin*. When it comes to German, she can claim authority to correct him, being a native speaker of German. I produce a continuer (line 11), and Takashi proceeds to produce more German words for animals, starting with *schnecke* ('snail' in line 12). Katharina also produces a continuer (line 13). I express a token of surprise (line 14), which is taken up by Takashi (line 15) with a slightly dramatized intonation, possibly to "show off" his German skills in a humorous way. Katharina proposes that he likes the sound of German words (like 16), to which Takashi agrees (line 17). He specifies that he thinks some words sound cute (line 19). I produce the continuer *mhm* (line 20) and he proceeds to list words that he thinks "sound cute," like *schnecke* in line 21. He is asking for the German word for "frog" (line 21). Katharina gives the answer *frosch* (line 22), which I register and Takashi evaluates it as "cute" (line 25). In this sequence, Katharina can assume the role as expert to share her knowledge of German with him. By doing so, linguistic resources are exchanged. Katharina and I chuckle (lines 26 & 27) in reaction to him producing German words. She then further reflects on his usage of German words. She claims that he wants to know words in German not because of the meaning but because of appreciation of the sound (line 29). This can be interpreted as claim that he does not want to actually *learn* the language. When talking about German that he located on his language portrait, he also says that he is not really interested in learning the language. Katharina's move implies that his engagement with German could be superficial and focused on playful appreciation of sound only. However, she also says that some words are similar to German, so it could be easier to remember for him (lines 31 & 33). He agrees (line 34).

While German is not a language Takashi can use to have conversations with his partner, there are occasions in which it comes up in interaction. The value they attach to this resource, however, is less communicative in the sense of exchanging information, but *emotional*. Katharina does use German at her workplace and with friends, but for Takashi, it a is language that is confined to the private sphere that he inhabits solely with his partner. In the previous examples, Takashi describes Katharina's attempts to use Japanese with him. In this extract, Katharina describes his attempts to learn at least some German. They mutually attribute stances toward each other's competences in their partners L1, respectively.

Extract 5.12: Random words

36	Florian:	ya. ((1,3)) okay.
37		how did you take interest in- in- in that,=in these single words,
38		was there any: ((1,0)) i don't know any: occasion.=
39	Takashi:	=ah:: interesting question. i don't know. eh:m
40		((2,1)) ((sound of motorcyle in background))
41		i think i had those moments where i just wanted to say
42		random words. (.) °in german.°
43	Florian:	mhm.
44	Takashi:	((1,2)) and if i say something like that it sounds stupid,
45		and maybe like (.) she's gonna laugh.
46	Florian:	$okay.$
47	Katharina:	hm.
48	Takashi:	ya:.
49	Florian:	mhm.
50	Takashi:	i guess that's the reason.
51	Florian:	((1,1)) okay.
52	Takashi:	like s- the other day i suddenly wanted to say,
53		i am sixteen years old ((0,9)) cat. no- no penguin.
54	Katharina:	mhm.
55	Takashi:	in german.
56	Florian:	[@okay. why@ $did you want to say that,$
57	Takashi:	[( )
58		and then she eh told me how to say.
59	Florian:	mhm.
60	Takashi:	ah sorry what was the question? when?
61	Florian:	eh do you remember how to to t- say that?
62	Takashi:	ich bin (.) eine
63	Katharina:	ein.
64	Takashi:	ein.
65		<ich bin ein sechstin jahr alter pinguin.>
66	Katharina:	hm.
67	Florian:	hm. [very good.
68	Takashi:	[oh:, oh:,
69	Florian:	[it's great.
70	Katharina:	[it's close. [((laughs))
71	Takashi:	[ya. ya.
72	Florian:	$good. ya.$
73	Takashi:	°yaya.°

74	Florian:	((1,5)) okay. ((0,7)) why did you want to learn that @phrase@=
75		=[((laughs))
76	Takashi:	=[((laughs)) i don't know. [$just random.$
77	Katharina:	[@it's cute.@
78	Florian:	o[kay.
79	Katharina:	[just random thoughts.
80	Florian:	mhm.
81	Katharina:	because we were eh:, when we were working out ((0,4))
82		we kind of started to <learn from y- counting.>
83	Florian:	[mhm.
84	Katharina:	[from one to twenty.
85	Florian:	okay. [i- in german?]
86	Katharina:	[a:nd,] in german.
87	Florian:	[okay.]
88	Katharina:	[yaya.] and then just,
89		i think you said the number sixteen sounds cool, ((0,8)) or like (.)
90	Florian:	mhm.

After producing several false starts in phrasing the question, I ask them why he wanted to know words in German (lines 37–38). Takashi takes up this question and needs some time to think about an answer (lines 39–40). He then says that he sometimes wants to know some "random words" in German (lines 41–42). I indicated to him to continue (line 43). Takashi describes that saying random words in German would sound "stupid" (line 44) and, in effect, Katharina would laugh (line 45). I acknowledge his statement with smiling (line 46). After some continuers from Katharina and my side, he adds "i guess that's the reason" (line 50) to preliminarily conclude his explanations. I register his statement (line 51).

He affords the ordinariness of using German words in mainly English discourse to elicit a positive reaction from his partner. The funny effect here is animal words out-of-context. For him, German is a resource to try to make interactions more fun and to cheer up his partner. It is not the language to talk about serious issues. For these purposes, he prefers English. Katharina does not agree or disagree here.

Takashi then gives an example. In this example, he not only wants to know a single German word, but a whole sentence. He wants to produce "I am a sixteen years old penguin" in German (line 52–53). He corrects himself from "cat" to "penguin" (line 53). The word "suddenly" indicates a spontaneous thought (line 52). To utter this sentence for him as a human would indeed come across as funny. Katharina produces a continuer (line 54). I start

to laugh and ask him why he wanted to know such an expression (line 56). Takashi finishes his short narrative, saying that Katharina taught him the German expression for this sentence (line 58). He then goes back to confirm my question (line 60). I formulate a new question, since I got interested in this amusing expression (line 61) and I ask him if he can remember the sentence in German. My question is a way to challenge him, to challenge his limited proficiency in German. I reframed my question from asking about the intention why he wants to know phrases in German to ask if he can remember and produce this phrase. Takashi starts to produce the sentence with 'I am a' ("ich bin eine" in line 62). Katharina corrects his "eine" to "ein," the grammatically correct form of the indirect article congruent with the German noun *Pinguin* in this structure (line 63). Takashi repeats the correct form "ein" (line 64) and then produces slowly the whole sentence for 'I am a sixteen-years old penguin' (line 65). His pronunciation of *sechzehn* 'sixteen' shows some traces of English pronunciation. Katharina and I register his utterance (lines 66 & 67), and I evaluate it with "very good" (line 67) to praise his German. This overlaps with staged surprise uttered by him (line 68). I rephrase my appreciation as "it's great" (line 69), which overlaps and parallels with Katharina's critical evaluation of his performance as "it's close" (line 70). She repeats this expression here again to assess his German as not quite correct. By doing so, she exerts authority to make assessments of his competence in German. She can take on the role of an expert. At the same time, Takashi is put on the spot in this situation when he is confronted with two German speakers who expect him to produce a sentence in German.

In line 74, I repeat my initial question and ask why he wanted to learn such a phrase in German. I laugh again (line 75), so does Takashi, and he says that there was no specific reason why he wanted to know this phrase (line 76). Katharina evaluates it as "cute" (line 77), taking up the same expression he used before to describe his impression of German words. I register their statements with "okay" (line 78) and Katharina takes up again Takashi's expression "random" (line 79). They align in ascribing no profound motivation for inserting German expressions into their interactions. German is less relevant for the necessities of getting tasks done which is required in daily communication.

Katharina adds to their activities in learning German. She explains that they started from counting in German when they were doing home-workouts together (line 81–82). Physical activity was used as an opportunity to teach Takashi some German. I confirm that they were learning how to count in German (line 85), which is affirmed by Katharina (line 86). She cites Takashi who said that "number sixteen sounds cool" (line 89). She puts forward this

expression to explain why Takashi used "sixteen-years old" in the seemingly "random" German phrase. Her move is an attempt to make sense of his word choice. At the same time, it is a short insight into their communicative practices that consist not only of English, but include bits and pieces of other languages—German in this case.

Takashi's attempt to learn some German phrase could be interpreted as a way to accommodate to his partner. Although he says in another sequence of the interview that he is not so much interested in studying German, his playful attempt to use "random" German phrases does indicate some engagement with the language. German is connected to his partner. Without Katharina, he would not have had the opportunity to learn some phrases of the language. In the interview sequence about their language portrait (see Grosser 2025), he says that German is "a part of him." Katharina takes on the role of the expert in the language to transmit her knowledge and to instruct him. She is attentive and appears to be trying to understand his German. Katharina is also the one who can determine the allegedly legitimate variety of the language. At the same time, the scope of her legitimacy in German is much more restricted than his legitimacy over correct use of Japanese, as Japanese permeates larger domains of her life.

5.4 Discussion: Dimensions of language choice

The examples above show that while English continues to be the established default language in Katharina and Takashi's communication after living together for over a year, non-use of Japanese is contested as well. Language choices are subject to ongoing negotiation. Such negotiations of language choice are one avenue to understand lived experiences of language and perceptions of communicative competence. I presented an interactional perspective on Katharina and Takashi's interpretation of their own communicative practices. The couples' language management is viewed alongside couple discourse (see, for example, Gordon 2009). Special emphasis is placed on sequences in which explicit metapragmatic discourse surfaces in interactions. These sequences center around the questions why Japanese as default language does not seem to work for them. They use various resources to take stance, notably Katharina's citation of her own thoughts, normalization or routinization, and parallelism across turns.

How to go on about language choice is a source of potential discordance among them, as it is a "discrepancy between what is expected and what actually happens" (Takekuro 2020: 86)

in their relationship. Expectations are grounded in respective desires and imaginations of how linguistic repertoires can converge in order to build a sustainable relationship. We can therefore also see a discrepancy not only between what is expected, but also what is desired as an ideal calibration of resources. They diverge in their perceptions of how stable language configurations have to be. In contrast to Japanese, their engagement with German is a creative way to explore their multilingual identities. In a multilingual relationship, language choices often appear unquestioned. But the question of choice arises when several options are available. As in this case, there is room for negotiating options, thus my investigation traced the metapragmatics of language choice of a single couple.

5.4.1 Beyond grammatical competence

On a superficial level, using English instead of Japanese seems to be an issue of Katharina's Japanese competence. However, it is only one aspect that factors in deciding which languages to use when spending one's life together. The extent to which a speaker knows the structural and pragmatic rules in a language obviously guides a choice. Katharina's competence in Japanese is characterized as limited in some contexts, making English the preferred choice. However, if her Japanese competence would be lacking, they could not have a conversation in Japanese. But talking in Japanese does work, even when they talk about difficulties in communicating with each other (Section 5.3.4). What is more, she also used it for interpreting at an event in Tokyo. All these cues point to a sufficient competence of Japanese in various settings.

Both have a high level of English, making it an evident candidate for communication. One reason why English is favored can also be attributed to having a more equal status, as has been reported for couples that use English as a lingua franca (e.g., Pietikäinen 2020). When using English, Katharina and Takashi can both claim language ownership, as access to this resource is already established and more equally distributed. Issues of understanding and expressibility are less an issue in their English discourse. German is not an option for them, because he does not know enough of the language to have a conversation with her.

However, as the analysis suggests, competence in and across languages needs more than the mere knowledge of a linguistic system and rules for use. Communicative competence is *intersubjective*. It encompasses the ability and willingness to understand and accommodate to the other. Katharina and Takashi address the issue of understanding explicitly (Extract 5.6).

In this example, Takashi is presumably not used to understand L2 Japanese. Or, he is just not willing enough to understand Katharina's Japanese, although they do not seem to have trouble in communicating in the recordings they provided me in Japanese. Intersubjective competence, however, also goes beyond understanding and accommodation. This concept is pointing to the idea that competence is distributed among individuals and therefore created and assessed in the mind of others (Duranti 2015), as individuals make sense of their own competence in languages by relating to others (Rydell 2018). More radically, competence in language can only come into being as *relationally constructed*, as I outlined with the concept of the reflexive loop. These constructions become visible when Katharina and Takashi mutually characterize each other's competences in different languages. Katharina's competence in expressing herself in Japanese, her appraisal of his English competence, and Takashi's competence in understanding her in Japanese and his evaluations of her Japanese are perceptions that can only be relationally constructed.

5.4.2 Emotions and desire

Choice, in Katharina and Takashi's case, is guided by how they feel toward using their linguistic resources in interaction. On a denotational level, Katharina describes using Japanese with him as *hazukashii* 'embarrassing' (Extract 1). This feeling could be directed at her competence in Japanese, but also at the context of using it with him. She expresses her frustration when he is not willing or able to understand her, and when he does not respond to her in Japanese but in English (Sections 5.3.5 and 5.3.6). They describe communicating in Japanese as annoying (Extract 5.6) We can see these emotions as the outcome of the moments in which communicative competence is experienced as a source of conflict.

For Katharina, meeting her partner is an outcome of her engagement with Japanese. As Piller (2002: 269) reports, "couples describe their meeting a partner from another linguistic background as a result of their L2 learning, rather than vice versa." This could explain why Katharina is frustrated, because her desire to use Japanese is not fulfilled—but even rejected by her partner. These emotional responses are oriented to issues of communicative and intersubjective competence, situated in the specific interactional contexts that she inhabits with her partner. In contrast, Takashi's engagement with German is a result of meeting his partner, not of his own motivation of L2 learning.

English, on the other hand, is a language that they both feel "more comfortable" using with each other (Extract 5.7). Comfortableness is a dimension of competence where its connection to emotions is particularly salient.

German is a peripheralized resource but has attachments to emotions as well. The couple perceives Takashi's attempts to use German as "cute," because they appear in seemingly "random" contexts. They view these single German expressions as devoid of meaning, yet resourceful to cheer up communication. In this way, they are meaningful resources in establishing a shared or "hybrid" identity as a couple.

5.4.3 Spatiotemporal contexts

The couple refers to spaces and times that create boundaries of home/private and work, or inside/outside more generally, when making sense of language choices. This echoes the ideology of *uchi/soto* distinctions that influence behavior (see 2.2). The spatial arrangement of their relationship during the period analyzed underwent profound changes. After their first encounter in Tokyo, they were leading a long-distance relationship for some time, and their interactions were taking place virtually. Then, they started to live together when Katharina moved to Osaka. They also moved apartments within Osaka. Takashi uses English at his workplace. Katharina uses Japanese and German at her workplace. Takashi describes scenes when Katharina comes back home and wants to use Japanese with him. Japanese is carried from outside into their private space which causes disturbance in his perception. Katharina makes a compromise by adapting to English within their private space. Takashi can draw on Japanese as L1 and his experience of growing up in the country. A high competence in Japanese could make it easier for Katharina to participate in the Japanese society. At the same time, English is also a resource of privacy, a strategy to conceal their conversations in public spaces from a dominantly Japanese-speaking audience in Japan. They present English as a private code, as a way to shield their conversations on trains and in restaurants from overhearers, who they presume not to be able to understand English. This mirrors dominant ideas about low English proficiency in Japan (see, for example, Iino 2010 on this topic). English is therefore a resource to maintain privacy in public places. By using English, they also align with the figure of an international persona or couple, that is a growing group of people in multilingual relationships in Japan. Their interaction intersects with larger societal discourses about language choices, practices, and competences. Domains associated with

spaces are therefore a resource to discursively establish their partnership and rationalize their language choice.

The couple's orientation toward time-spaces is also evident when looking at the resources they use to build their stances. They use adverbs of time or frequency, like "always" or "sometimes" in the interview.

5.4.4 Interactional trajectories

Tracing interactional trajectories shows how language choice becomes enregistered in a relationship, if not firmly settled from the outset of the encounter. Negotiation of choice unfolds over time. By continuously using English, Katharina and Takashi's affirming stances toward English accrete and become enduring, turning English into a solidified "default." Talking in English becomes an established routine and normalized. Right after their first encounter, it seems that English was quickly adopted as preferred choice. They made occasional attempts to use Japanese while in Japan, talking over long-distance, and when they started to live together. However, these attempts were aborted, because Takashi started to refuse using Japanese with Katharina. The accommodation she made toward him solidified their preference for English. However, they diverge in their understanding of how stable the language configurations in their relationship have to be. Even at this point, Japanese would be an option for Katharina, but not for Takashi.

Changes in the trajectory of language choice also mirror in our interactions in the interview. The first interview with them was in Japanese, which also reflects my initial design of the research project as an investigation of interactions in Japanese only. The second and third interview were both conducted in English, because I realized it became their default language, and therefore found it appropriate to use English.

5.4.5 Ideologies

At several instances in the data analyzed, participants make explicit statements about languages and language use. This is expected, as language-biographical interviews are a form of metapragmatic discourse and arena of positioning (Kim 2022). Statements about language are grounded in ideologies of language, specifically language configurations, code coherence, and native speakerism. For Katharina, conversations should be held in one language, while

insertion of single words may be allowed. Such ideas of dialogical configuration are an outcome of a *monolingual organization of multilingualism*. This bias toward one language sanctions code-switching as a legitimate form of communication. The choice of English as their language allows for the sporadic insertions of Japanese (*shooyu*) and German (numbers, animals) as marginal resources. But such ideologies also surface as *native speaker bias* (Takeuchi 2023b), when Takashi suspends and refuses to use Japanese with his partner, who might not fully adhere to native-speaker norms of using Japanese. Such an ideology has structuring force for future interactions. Monolingual bias also surfaces when I construct languages as distinct entities in the interview, when I ask them if they use "English or Japanese" or expect them not to use German with each other. In summary, these may be examples of "monolingual ways of seeing multilingualism" (Piller 2016).

For Takashi, language (choice) is closely tied to personality, when he says that alternating languages feels for him like changing personalities. It is yet another aspect that deprives Katharina of speaker legitimacy in Japanese, as he perceives her as a different person in Japanese, in contrast to English. Going beyond persona, ideologies also mirror in understandings of gendered relations in a relationship. Takashi, being the male part of this relationship, appears to be the dominant force that shapes language choice, while Katharina takes on a more accommodating role when adjusting her communication to her partner.[60]

5.5 Conclusion

Choosing a language to communicate in daily life can be a delicate issue. In a familiar yet new environment, linguistic resources undergo new contextualizations and reshape the linguistic repertoire. The analysis shows the repercussions that occur along the pathway of an L2 user of Japanese. For Katharina, linguistic experience in Japan is part of an experience of communicative competence in interaction with her partner. Interaction in a relationship is one dimension and example of how a user of Japanese makes sense of her repertoire and how she perceives it in relation to her evolving *language life* in Japan. Competence in using linguistic resources is not solely anchored in a single subject but emerges intersubjectively. It

[60] Ideologies, however, are interlocked with personal experience and socialization. Takashi was socialized in Japan and may therefore take up the dominant positions in other aspects of daily life. He may be in charge of, for example, contracts, correspondence, or negotiation with the realtor.

is guided by emotional responses to linguistic interactions, in which desires, expectations, and imaginations are explored. Competence in language is a *chronotopic* experience, as time and space shape the repertoire and expression of the repertoire (Agha 2007b). Lastly, communicative practices are always guided by ideologies that fuel and shape every linguistic action. In the examples analyzed here, we can see ideologies of monolingualism directing the language choices of two multilingual partners. These negotiations reveal unequal power structures between partners in a cis-heterosexual relationship.

In this chapter, I showcased the lived experiences of Katharina and Takashi. Katharina's discussions about language choices with her partner Takashi illustrate her experiences that encompass questions about competence in languages. I traced pathways of interactions in which competence in language in subsequent discussions about language choice are made relevant, as they appear as an issue that engenders instances of discordance in the couple's relationship. Through accreted stances and the couple's presentation and attribution of these stances, using English as default language gradually became the enregistered choice. Katharina faces challenges to create a private space in which she can explore using Japanese as a resource to interact with her partner in Japan. Her experiences also include moments of delegitimization through her partner as an L2 user in Japan. She can draw on English and—to a lesser degree—German in her relationship. However, being unable to use the dominant language of the country she moved to build a new life also brings about feelings of resignation and frustration. She experiences events of using Japanese with her partner as shameful and a source of communicative trouble. These experiences become inscribed into her repertoire and therefore influence future perceptions of competence and manifest in interactions.

6 Rhythms of Request in a Workplace Narrative

6.1 Introduction[61]

Competence in Japanese, and distinct use of specific registers of Japanese, is a requirement at most workplaces in Japan. The workplace is one arena in which an L2 user's competence is made relevant. In this chapter, I argue that language use at work is another part of the *lived experiences* (Busch 2017) L2 users of Japanese make. Here, I elucidate this experience within the context of a professional linguistic environment. I introduce a German individual, Nina, and analyze her narrated experiences by attending to how she reflects on interactions and communicative practices at her workplace. This provides insight into how competence perceptions and workplace socialization are interconnected processes that ratify a person as a speaking subject.

My interlocutor is a dexterous narrator. She uses rhythmic parallelisms and various forms of voicing to let her narrated actors speak. In her narration, she modulates pitch and pace to draw the audience into the everyday scenes at her workplace. Nina particularly addresses competing perspectives on registers and styles that she encounters in interactions with her co-workers. These distinctions are inscribed into her body and figure in her language portrait that I introduce in Section 6.3.1 (refer also to the sections about language portraits in 4.2.4). In this example, Nina discusses honorifics and resources to create politeness in workplace discourse. In Japanese discourse, use honorifics to create politeness follows routinized patterns. In Nina's narrative, however, such routine is time-consuming and diverts attention away from the actual work, as she and her colleagues have to re-read, amend, and refine honorifics in their business communication. Nina uses parallelisms and metrical structures to build her stance toward such communicative practices at her workplace (Section 6.3.2). Another resource she uses in stancetaking is citational practices or

[61] I orally presented parts of the analysis of rhythm in this chapter at a study group at the *German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)* in March 2025, and at the annual conference of the *Gesellschaft für Angewandte Linguistik (GAL)* in September 2025, *Sektion Soziolinguistik*.

constructed dialogue, in which she animates—*voices*—her colleagues' and her own communication in Japanese and English (Section 6.3.3). These voicings serve as a comparison of practices and appear in Nina's narrative about framing requests at the workplace. Voicing is a prominent resource she uses in performing her story and telling me about her experiences and repeatedly surface in many of the examples discussed here.

Nina's ascriptions of narrated actors' intentionality emerge at various moments in the interview (Section 6.3.4). She tries to infer her colleagues' as well as customers' intentions. Her experience at the workplace is shaped by moments of *differentiation*—situations in which she compares communicative practices between her colleagues and herself (Section 6.3.5). These differences become overt in and through language but are rooted in discourses of identity and language management at the workplace. As one part of her job is to translate, mostly from Japanese into English, Nina also reflects on language work (Section 6.3.6), and how languages are unequally treated at her workplace (see Duchêne 2020 on professional language work). Her *professional vision* (Goodwin 1994) of language and appropriate communication with clients emerges from her competence and experience, as well as her subject position in Japan, being someone with a multilingual trajectory. I will show how dominant ideas about languages and speakers impact a mobile individual's experiences and professional career in Japan.

I conclude this chapter with a discussion of style and efficiency at the workplace (Section 6.4.1), how the Japanese workplace intersects with subjectivities and legitimization of communicative practices (Section 6.4.2), and highlight the relevance of rhythm and voicing when investigating lived experiences of competence (Section 6.4.3).

6.2 Contextualizing experience in workplace narratives

In the following sections, I will briefly review some of the theoretical concepts that are used in the analysis of workplace narratives. I use *workplace narrative* here as a term denoting retrospective account of events at the workplace, told in an interview setting. I do not investigate narratives that happen *at* a workplace as, for example, Holmes (2006) did. Revisiting the relevant contexts here helps us understand how experiences at the workplace are *contextualized* within narrative discourse. I take up voicing as a citational practice that Nina uses to animate her own and other's voices in our interviews, thereby taking stance toward communicative practices at the workplace. The workplace requires interactants to

acquire generic competence with honorifics. At the same time, Nina engages in language work when she prepares translations. She translates between English and Japanese. These different perspectives on register competence and competence across languages are significant to Nina's *experience* of language at the workplace. In the next section, I review the resources she draws on in her narratives to portray her experience to me in the interview.

6.2.1 Stance and voicing

Stance is coupled with positioning in narratives. Narrative positioning in interview contexts is embedded in "a frame that opens a field of a multitude of possible identity-constructions that can be realized by the narrator through his [sic] way of telling his story and of relating to the interviewer" (Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann 2000: 210). Narrators discursively highlight aspects of their identity in interaction, such as being an L2 user of Japanese (see, e.g., Fukuda 2014; Grosser 2023b; Takeuchi 2023b on Japanese, and more, generally on identity and interaction, Bucholtz & Hall 2004). L2 users of Japanese highlight or downplay contrasts through *comparison* and *perspectivation*, thereby engaging in ideological work (Gal & Irvine 2019). In this chapter, I present instances in which perceptions of in/directness in English and Japanese discourse are compared.

While interacting with people in Japan, international workers assume subject positions and experience processes of *subjectivation*, i.e., being "made" into a person through assignment and attribution of stances. At the same time, they assign and attribute stances to the people they encounter. Hence, such processes are always intersubjective. By attending to retrospective accounts about interactional experiences, we can shed light on how learners make sense of their competence, in this case, in workplace contexts. The analysis here focuses on citations, i.e., recycling of other people's voices, for example, co-workers. This voicing is not a mimicry or accurate report of prior conversational discourse, but an interactionally *constructed* (Tannen 2007 [1989]) discourse that the narrator reflexively marks as a representation of past speech events (Nakassis 2013). Narratives are contextualized. My interlocutor Nina contextualizes her stories by drawing on poetic, particularly prosodic devices. These include repetition and changes in pace, volume, and phonation types (see, e.g., Günthner 2002; Tannen 2007 [1989]) to characterize or animate others, but also to prosodically elevate their own thoughts. An additional layer of contextualization is achieved through text-metrical configuration of signs, particularly repeated emphasis that creates

rhythm. Intonation emerges as an index that points to and at the same time iconically stands for perceptions of work-related procedures and the frustration my interlocutor experiences in these situations. I thus integrate the *poetic function of language* (Jakobson 1960) with a metapragmatic stancetaking analysis. Attention to prosodic devices is here in line with Hymes' (1981: 337–341) conceptions of *ethnopoetics* that regards verbal performances as part-and-parcel of individuals' culturally-embedded practices of identification.

6.2.2 Genericity and mediation

The workplace is a neoliberal space that demands specific competences or *skills* (Urciuoli 2008) for interaction and social action. At the late-modern Japanese workplace, subjects are expected to engage in *doing generality* (Reckwitz 2017: 37), meaning that everyone is expected to master the same set of skills and competences required at the workplace. Generality is an outcome of the recontextualization of generic practices—forms of communication that are highly patterned, recognizable, and reiterated (*enregistered*). While this is easier to achieve with workers in monolingual environments, when working with several languages—and among people with different linguistic repertoires and trajectories—the situation more complex. Linguistic resources in a company may be unequally evaluated (Duchêne 2020). Especially for the case of Japan, hierarchy may impose forms of communication on employees (Fairbrother 2015a).

Multilingual profesionalrs respond to this in various ways. They may hybridize forms, adhere to norms, or subvert them. For example, Menard-Warwick & Leung (2017) present narratives in which L2 users of Japanese tell about interactional experiences at the Japanese workplace. The L2 users exhibit a desire to accommodate to local norms and thereby claim legitimacy in Japanese, in order to be accepted at the Japanese workplace (see also my example of in Extract 3.3). This figures in how mediators between languages are treated. International workplaces are multilingual and employees make use of several languages. They often also mediate between these languages. They engage in *language work* (Thurlow 2020), which includes, for example, interpreting and translations. When working in more than one language, individuals may compare communicative structures and practices. Comparisons mirror an individuals' perspective and ideological uptake of discourse (Gal & Irvine 2019). For example, stereotypically, English (and German) discourse is perceived to be more direct in contrast to Japanese discourse (Miller 1994).

6.2.3 L2 Japanese, honorifics, politeness

Ideologies of communication serve as a yardstick to which competences are measured. In the Japanese context, these ideologies oscillate between assessing L2 users as equal to L1 users of Japanese, and counter-ideas that do not expect them to linguistically behave in the same way as L1 users. In this chapter, I look at a specific type of competence that can be described as *register competence*, or competence in a specific genre of talk in business contexts. This register comprises formularization and patterning of language that are ideologically deemed necessary at the Japanese workplace (Dunn 2011). This patterning is a process in which generality is transmitted to workers, including international workers. The honorific register is called *keigo* and comprises mainly morphosyntactic forms and lexemes (Koyama 2004; Pizziconi 2011; Yamashita 2001; Wetzel 2004). Japanese "*keigo* forms are so strongly associated with the enactment of linguistic politeness" (Okamoto & Shibamoto-Smith 2016: 125) that the two often have been conflated. *Keigo* is only one element of politeness practices in Japanese—but it is the most salient one in discourses about how to behave politely in the maintenance of social relations in Japan. What constitutes as "polite" is a complex web of parameters that span linguistic analysis, interaction, and academic descriptions (see Koyama 2004 for a discussion).

Actual use of honorifics at the workplace is a contested and ongoing issue in metapragmatic discourses in Japan. White-collar work is one sphere in which questions of style and register feature prominently (see, e.g., Cook & Shibamoto-Smith 2018; Saito 2011). In order to become competent in discerning styles, workers can—or sometimes must—undergo business language trainings (Cook 2018; Dunn 2011, 2013). Politeness practices thus become *institutionally authorized*.

Some researchers tried to approach the complex field of politeness and honorifics in Japanese from an *emic perspective* (see, for example, Fukushima & Haugh 2014; Fukushima & Sifianou 2017)—and this aligns with my approach in this chapter. However, I focus on an L2 user's emic perspective of styles and practices at the workplace (see Haugh 2007 for a similar emic approach to L2 Japenese users' ideas about honorifics). The aim here is not to investigate whether Nina's actions are actually interpreted as polite by her co-workers, but rather how she views honorifics and how she construes certain linguistic actions as polite. Recently, Researchers have turned their attention to how L2 users of Japanese make sense of honorifics and how they adapt to or subvert dominant norms (Iwasaki 2011; McConachy & Fujino 2022;

Moody 2018). They focus on the metapragmatics of politeness. While I do incorporate some aspects of traditional pragmatic research on politeness in the sense of Brown & Levinson (1987) in my interpretation, I concentrate on approaching the connection between politeness and honorifics from the person whose narrative I analyze in this chapter (see especially Extract 3 in Section 6.3.2).

Takeuchi (2023b: 38–59) discusses L2 user's perceptions of *keigo* through the lens of native speaker ideologies and speaker legitimacy. L2 users are confronted with ambivalent stances toward *keigo*. They sometimes report being excused from achieving high proficiency in this register. At the same time, they are being excluded from acquiring *keigo* and therefore may have diminished opportunities to be perceived as equal to L1 users of Japanese.[62]

In the examples below, I show how my interlocutor Nina perceives and characterizes such patterns, rather than observing them in actual workplace interactions. This aligns with the subjective-metapragmatic perspective on experience that I have adopted throughout this study.

6.3 Nina's experience at the Japanese workplace

I met Nina during a study-abroad year in Sendai, Northeast Japan. She majored in Japanese studies at a university in Germany. Our contact has spanned more than 10 years and several places. We occasionally reconnected in Germany and met in Tokyo when I visited Japan. She has been residing and working in the Kanto area (the region encompassing Tokyo and surrounding prefectures in the main island of Japan) since 2019. Her motivations to move to Japan were cultural and economic, typical of members of European migrants in Japan (Hof 2022). Nina embraces Japan's cultural attractiveness, being a fan of Japanese visual kei rock music and popular culture since many years. At the same time, Japan is a place for economic opportunities, as she can use and apply her knowledge of Japanese and Japanese culture and society.

At the time of our second interview, Nina works in customer support at a company that is part of a Japanese publishing house. Her experience at the Japanese workplace can be

[62] Recall the example (Extract 3.3) from the Theory Chapter Section 3.4.1 in which Katharina talks about how correct usage of *keigo* would be important for her to become accepted as a member in the Japanese workplace, not just a foreigner who is excused from being competent in this register.

described as a mediation between languages and registers. This manifests, on the one hand, internally, in her daily efforts in navigating and translating between languages and registers in her head. On the other hand, it externalizes in the form of translation tasks assigned to her at her workplace.

I interviewed her first in February 2023. Communicative practices at the workplace came up in the interview as one domain of her life in Japan. She invests time thinking about how to communicate at the workplace, and how discourse strategies differ across languages. She compares her communicative approach with that of her colleagues.

6.3.1 Embodied registers

In our first interview, Nina (henceforth abbreviated as NI in the transcripts) spoke about her now former workplace in customer support. She is working in international teams, frequently interacting in Japanese with Japanese colleagues. Prior to the following extract, she is telling me about a colleague who uses not as much 'company language' as the others in the team. *Firmsprache* 'company language' is the expression she uses in the extract below, yet this language is better linguistically described as a *register*. I take up this expression and ask her about this specific language at her workplace.

Extract 6.1: Firmensprache

1	FL:	okay. (.) ja. also: ja.=	*okay. (.) yeah. so: yeah=*
2		=gibt es sowas wie firmsprache bei euch=	*=is there something like company language=*
3		=die irgendwie von $fast allen$ geteilt wird?	*=that is you know shared by $almost everyone$?*
4	NI:	ja. es is halt ne. ja. die (.) die floskeln	*yeah. it's. yeah. the (.) the phrases*
5	FL:	mhm.=	*mhm.=*
6	NI:	=die halt man- die man einfach so: (.) benutzt.	*=that you that you simply (.) use like tha:t.*

I ask her about language use at the company and if it is shared by everyone (line 1). As she was telling me about a specific co-worker before, I mark the segment 'almost everyone' (line 3) with a smiley voice. Nina agrees and builds a shared epistemic stance, starting from line 4. She describes company language as 'set phrases' (*Floskeln*) that 'you simply use' (line 6). In this way, she presents this register as part of communicative practices that are normalized. This segment sets the scene, building from the register used in the domain of the workplace.

During the interview, we explore the nature of this company language. Nina describes it as a toolkit, containing elements that can be configured to create this type of language. Company language is a register containing honorifics. Due to longer and more complex morphosyntactic structures in this honorific register, she finds using it time-consuming. *Keigo* forms tend to consist of longer morphosyntactic constructions (in contrast to *teineigo* and casual forms) and therefore require more time and skills to produce them in writing and speaking. The difference may be (milli-)seconds. But time is money in a neoliberal workplace environment in which work procedures need to be fast and efficient. More cognitive processing is required when individuals try to figure out the appropriate expression to use.

More than a year later, I met Nina again. She still works in customer support, but at a different company. The company provides an online platform to buy digital books. She oversees English inquiries as part of the global team. She mainly uses Japanese with her Japanese coworkers.

In spring 2024, I ask her to draw a second language portrait for me (Figure 5). *Deutsch* ('German') is in a red heart. It is the language she feels the closest connection to, growing up with it and being socialized in a German-speaking environment. German is also her most comfortable language. Red is typically associated with the heart symbol. *Englisch* is purple

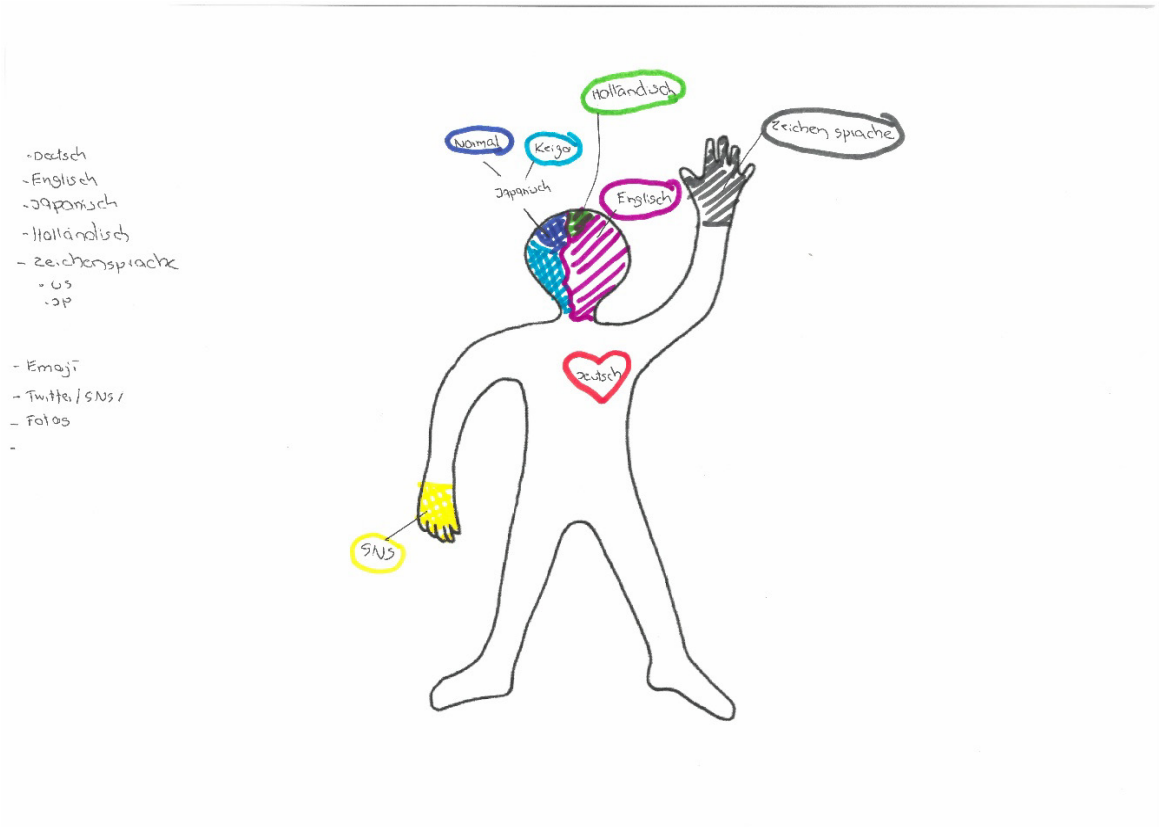


Figure 5. Nina's language portrait

and in the right part of her head. It takes up a large part, as she uses it in her private life with friends, on social networks, when reading books, and at her workplace. *Japanisch* ('Japanese') is in two shades of blue in her head. The *Normal* Japanese is in a darker shade and *Keigo* in turquoise. *Holländisch* ('Dutch') is in a small green section in her head. Growing up in an area close to the Dutch border, she has studied Dutch in school but told me that she almost never uses it nowadays. Thus, it takes up only a small portion in her head.

Zeichensprache ('sign language') is in grey in her upper hand. It is a language that she wants to study, as she feels it is important to be able to communicate with deaf people. The position at her hand iconically represents the gestures that are used in signing. SNS is in her lower hand, marked yellow. She uses her phone to engage in this type of communication, which is why it is located at her hand.

What I found interesting in this portrait is the distinction she made within Japanese. Japanese is divided into *Normal* and *Keigo*. For her, it feels like a different language. Another possible interpretation is that for her, Japanese is subdivided into two fundamental registers that she labels *normal* and *keigo*. She subdivides Japanese into these two, presenting them as distinct varieties. Both require cognitive processing. *Keigo* and normal Japanese are resources used in different contexts serving different functions. The fact that *Keigo* is distinguished from normal Japanese implies that it is *not* normal, thus a marked variety of the language.

6.3.2 Honorific rhythms

In the following extract, I ask her about the differentiation of Japanese in her head in the language portrait. She explains to me that *Normal* is the variety of Japanese that she uses with friends. In the following example, we talk more about her use of *Keigo*.

Extract 6.2: Normal und keigo

134	FL:	=ja. (.) ja cool.=vielleicht schauen wir dann direkt einmal	*=yeah. (.) yeah cool.=maybe we can look directly at*
135		darauf dass du ein unterscheidung zwischen normal	*that you made a distinction between normal*
136		und keigo gemacht.(.)	*and keigo (.)*
137		das ist <<s:pan[nend.>> °ja.°]	*that is <<inte[resting>> °yeah.°]*
138	NI:	[ja keigo is halt die sprache] die ich	*[yeah keigo is just the language] that I*
139		zum beispiel also vor allem auf der a:rbeit	*for example, so above all at wo:rk*
140	FL:	[mhm.	*[mhm.*

141	NI:	[am meisten verwende weil klar is das halt firm(.)sprache	*[use the most because sure it's company(.)language*
142		und kommunikation, das heißt auch auf messenger	*and communication, that means also on messenger*
143		oder für emails oder sonstiges vor allem wenn ich halt	*or for emails or other things especially if I*
144		japanischen kunden antworten [muss is es halt immer keigo,	*have to reply to Japanese customers [it's always keigo,*
145	FL:	[mhm.	*[mhm.*

I draw our attention of the activity to the distinction she makes within Japanese (lines 134–136), while she describes her portrait. I slow down the pace of my turn while looking at the portrait and evaluate her distinction as 'intriguing' (line 137). My slower speech presents an opportunity to Nina to take over the floor to talk about *keigo*. She explains in which context she uses it. *Keigo* is the language she uses at work (line 139). She labels it as *firm(.)sprache* ('company language' in line 141) and thereby locates this type of language in the professional domain. The act of labeling this register is linked across two speech events, the interview in February 2023, and the interview in April 2024. She goes on to explain that she mostly uses it in written communication, on the company-internal messenger and e-mails (lines 142–143), especially when communicating with Japanese customers (lines 143–144).

For L2 users of Japanese, *keigo* seems to be important for workplace communication. This aligns with Katharina's explanation (Extract 3.3 in Section 3.4) that *keigo* is important to her when communicating with superiors at her workplace.

With this brief contextualization of situations in which Nina uses *keigo*, she sets the scene of her narrative. Her narrative ensues an explicit evaluation of this register and associated workplace practices. Time is the dimension onto which she anchors her narrative.

Extract 6.3: Keigo braucht so viel zeit

147	NI:	eh::m. ((1,9)) und keigo braucht so:: viel zei:t.	*eh::m. ((1,9)) and keigo takes so:: much ti:me.*
148	FL:	mhm.	*mhm.*
149	NI:	also: (.) im vergleich zu englisch wenn ich jetzt	*so: (.) compared to english, when I*
150		mit dem globalen team kommuniziere-	*communicate with the global team-*
151		kommunikation geht halt so viel schneller.	*communication is just so much faster.*
152	FL:	okay=	*okay=*
153	NI:	=als japanisch weil du immer noch mal drüber schaust.	*=than in japanese because you always have to double-check.*

154		ja is es höflich genu:g,[ist es das richtige wo:rt,	*like is it polite enou:gh, [is it the right wo:rd,*
155	FL:	[mhm.	*[mhm.*

She says that *keigo* takes so much time, emphasized with stress (line 147). I register this statement (line 148) and Nina compares time efforts in Japanese and English communication (line 149). Communication in Japanese appears to be slower than in English, the main language she uses when communicating with the global team (lines 150–151). 'Time' and 'faster' emerge here as indexicals that point to her experience of using honorific language at the workplace. On the denotational level, she explicitly states that using this register takes a lot of time. She adds an additional layer of implicit metapragmatic positioning to utterance, an iconic dimension. In this example, lengthening on *keigo braucht so:: viel zei:t* is an indexical icon that exemplifies longer time-intervals, iconized through longer duration and higher volume on the syllables. These suprasegmentals intensify the investment in her stance.

I register this with *okay* (line 152) and she immediately gives the other point of comparison, Japanese (line 153). And she presents reasons why communicating in Japanese is slower than in English. She says that checking again is common (line 153), here using *du* ('you,' informal 2nd person singular). This *du* seems to be directed at the listener but allows for some more inferences. For example, *du* could here rather indicate a general or impersonal use (Deringer et al. 2015). It could also invite an interpretation as a subjective expression of "the speaker's personal or even private experiences" (Auer & Stukenbrock 2018: 293). Nina is aware that I am not working at a Japanese company and might thus not be familiar with communicative routines at her workplace. *Du* indexes the act of sharing her epistemic status with me.

Nina explains to me what checking Japanese sentences includes here. She is concerned with politeness and wants to check if communication is 'polite enough' (*höflich genu:g)* and if she uses the 'right word' (*das richtige wort* in line 154). Nina clearly associates politeness as an emic concept with *keigo*. Politeness and correctness are deeply engrained with normative perceptions of this honorific register (see Okamoto & Shibamoto-Smith 2016: 145–199 for perceptions of honorific language). She places emphasis on 'polite' and 'word.' Enumeration is marked with lengthening on 'enough.'

She continues to talk about using *keigo* at her workplace.

Extract 6.4: Wir würden so viel zeit sparen

156	NI:	halt auch meine (.) kolle:gen die halt selber japaner sind.	*even my (.) colleagues who are japanese*
157		wenn die halt ehm zum beispiel leute aus anderen teams	*when they, for example, [talk to people from other teams*
158		oder den chef [ansprechen,	*or the boss,*
159	FL:	[mhm	*[mhm*
160	NI:	wie oft die (1,2) ihre na:chrichten noch mal übera:rbeiten,	*how often they (1,2) re:write their me:ssages,*
161		>und noch ne keigo form hinten dranhängen,<	*>add another keigo form at the end,<*
162		>und dann noch mal drüberlesen<	*>and then read over it again to make sure <*
163		ob es auch [wirklich jetzt]	*[if it's really]*
164	FL:	[okay] mhm. =	*[okay] mhm.=*
165	NI:	=ne firmenintern,	*=even though it's just internal,*
166		obwohls halt nur firmenintern oder teamintern is ehm	*even though it's only within the company or within the team, ehm*
167	FL:	mhm.	*mhm.*
168	NI:	auch ja höflich genug is	*if it is polite enough*
169		>denk ich mir so< wir würdn so viel ze:it sparen,	*>I think< we'd save so much ti:me,*
170	FL:	mh:::: [okay.	*mh:::: [okay.*
171	NI:	[wenn wir einfach normal und einfach	*[if we could just communicate in a normal and easy way*
172		↑>miteinander kommunizieren können.<=	*↑>with each other.<=*

Nina shifts from a rather general *du* to a third-person perspective and explains how her colleagues use *keigo* at the workplace. She refers to nationality when talking about her colleagues who are *selber japaner* ('Japanese person themselves' in line 156). This foreshadows the connection between nationality or ethnicity and competence that she develops in the following turns. She provides more context, setting the scene by explaining how her Japanese colleagues address members of other teams within the company (*leute aus anderen teams* in line 157) or their superior (line 158). The scene-setting preludes her ensuing talk about how her colleagues linguistically behave in these situations and the evolving evaluation of *keigo* practices.

The sequential organization within the messenger she uses with her colleagues—the time stamp that indicates when messages were sent in the first place—is visible on the interface. It also has a feature that allows for observing the editing of messages. This allows her to trace if messages have been edited.

She tells me how often her colleagues revise their messages (line 160), how they add another *keigo* form (line 161) and re-read their messages (line 162). Her pace accelerates in these lines. She puts emphasis on each of the three verbs. Lengthening and emphasis align on the verbs *überarbeiten, dranhängen, drüberlesen*. She uses lexical repetition of *noch* in each of these three lines and *und* ('and') in lines 161 & 162 and *mal* in lines 161 & 163. Note here that *nochmal* ('once again') is a compound adverb, while *noch* indicates an additional action.

The metrical configuration in this sequence renders a poetic text through parallelism that draws the listener into the scene (Example 6.1). We can imagine how hard the narrated co-workers refine their messages to make them sufficiently polite. However, Nina also builds her stance upon this metrical structure. The indexicals are poetically configured to create an image of time-consuming communicative practices that require a high level of reflexivity. Such reflexivity includes iterative circles of revisiting one's own messages to ensure sufficient politeness when communicating with people from other teams and superiors. This reiteration iconizes the linguistic labor that is involved in achieving politeness through configuration of honorifics. Through her prosodic performance, she embodies a stance (Thompson 2016)—it is an evaluation of time-efficiency in workplace communication.

Example 6.1. Poetic configuration of *keigo* communication

160	wie oft die (1,2) ihre na:chrichten			noch		mal	übera:rbeiten,
161		und		noch	ne keigo form hinten		dranhängen,
162		und	dann	noch		mal	drüberlesen

Note that sequentiality is present on several scales here (and also refer to 4.3.3 on sequence analysis as a method). Sequences are present in her narrative, for example, the sequence of interactions in written communication. This sequence is projected into the interview discourse, where sequentiality yields the parallel and poetic structure that illustrate her experience.

The turn that she starts in line 163 'if it is really …' is connected to 'polite enough' (line 168) but suspended through parenthesis. She adds a concessive clause 'although it's just company-internal or team-internal' communication. With this concessive clause, she builds a stance that indicates that less politeness is required for communication within her team. We can solidify such an interpretation when looking at how she uses emphasis on *obwohl* ('although') and *teamintern* (line 166). These prosodic cues conceptualize her emphasis and

stance toward workplace discourse. Her concern with expressions to be 'polite enough' (*höflich genug* in line 168) emerges here again as an indexical.

In the following turn, she explains how she directs her attention toward herself with *denk ich mir so* ('I think to myself') and adds that they would 'save a lot of time' (line 169). Here she introduces her reported thought. Stress lies, again, on 'time,' another relevant indexical that is related to using polite language at the workplace. I register this as new information with *okay* (line 170) which overlaps with her next turn in which she expands using a conditional clause. They (here deictically coded as *exclusive we* that denotes herself and her colleagues) would save a lot of time when they communicated in a 'normal and easy way' (lines 171–172). These two adverbs are stressed. She uses *normal* here again to establish a contrast to a different variety of Japanese that not normal and marked—that is *keigo*. And this marked variety is not easy. 'Communicating with each other' (line 172) is in a higher pitch, creating a slightly questioning or critical tone. These forms contribute to building a critical stance toward time-consuming and hard ways of communicating via polite language. A faster pace stands as an icon for easier, and therefore faster, communication in *normal* Japanese.

The fact that Nina perceives communication at her workplace as hard and time-consuming indexes a stance of frustration that she experiences in interactions with and among colleagues in Japanese. It appears that for her, valued time is spent on form—and therefore might go at the expense of content and quality of the actual work. This perception will be further explored below.

She uses a similar metrical structure in the following example at a later point in the same interview. Here, she reports a busy project they in which many different teams where involved, including the global team that communicates in English.

Extract 6.5: Frustriert

524	NI:	ehm habe ich dann wenn s halt wirklich dringend war	*uhm then I would, if it was really urgent,*
525		oder ich ein bisschen frustriert war halt eher	*or if I was a bit frustrated, I rather*
526		auf ↑englisch kommunikaziert,↓	*↑communicated in English,↓*
527	FL:	[mhm. ja.]	*[mhm. yeah.]*
528	NI:	[weil du halt] ne. >genauer sagen kannst was halt sache ist<	*[because you you] know. >you can get to the point<*
529		>und wo dein problem liegt und was [du erwa:rtest,<	*>and tell what your problem is and what [you expe:ct,<*
530	FL:	[mhm.	*[mhm.*

She tells me how she switched to English in urgent cases (line 524) or when she was frustrated with the course of the project (line 525). She frames 'communicated in English' with a high-low intonational contour (line 526) and then moves on to list reasons why she preferred English in these situations. English allows for more precise communication (line 528), including stating 'where your problem lies and what you expect' (line 529). *Sagen was sache ist* ('to tell it like it really is' in lines 528–529) focuses on propositional content which she deems important. It is about making communicative intent *transparent*. This sequence lists indexical expressions at faster pace and rhythmic stress on *sagen, sache, problem, erwartest* ('say, thing, problem, [you] expect'). This fast-paced list creates an image of more effective and direct communicative style in English.

Expectation is entextualized here and gradually becomes enregistered as an indexical expression in the context of workplace discourse in our interview. Expecting someone to do something is a component and fundamental requirement of the *moral accountability* inherent in social interaction (Enfield & Sidnell 2017), and especially relevant when jointly working in teams on a project. One needs to be aware of being held accountable for one's actions when performing in a group.

6.3.3 Voicing requests

Nina expands on her characterization of communicative practices at her workplace. She illustrates her experience in the narrative by drawing on *voicing* as a form of stylization and resource to build a stance. Voicing draws on comparison of communicative practices in Japanese and English. I present examples where Nina talks about two speech acts, requests and giving opinions.

Extract 6.6: Es tut mir leid

173	NI:	=°weil° >>es is [(es is) ja im japanischen<<	*=°because° >>in japanese, it's [(it's) like<<*
174	FL:	[mhm.	*[mhm.*
175	NI:	((imitating voice)) ja es- ich weiß du bis sehr busy	*((imitating voice)) yes, I know you're very busy,*
176		und es tut mir leid dass ich dich stö:re,	*and I'm sorry to bo:ther you,*
177		oder es ist bald scho[n feierabend aber könntest du eventuell,	*or it's al[most the end of the workday but could you possibly,*
178	FL:	[hm:.	*[hm:.*
179	NI:	wenns auch !gar keine umstände! macht, ehm=	*if it's really !no trouble at all!, ehm=*
180	FL:	=mhm. =	*=mhm. =*

181	NI:	=das und das checken?	*=check this and that?*
182	FL:	okay.	*okay.*

Nina starts to animate what communication in Japanese with colleagues typically sounds like. She prefaces the constructed voice with 'because, in Japanese, it's' (line 173). My *mhm* (line 174) is a continuer with which I show that I registered her talk about communicating in an easy way from the previous transcript. In the following lines, Nina animates a voice and performs a whole scene. The author or principal of expressing the request could be either herself or co-workers. She transports such a representation of communicative norms into the German interview discourse. She lists typical pragmatic resources that are used in Japanese when asking for a favor—in this case, asking someone to check something. She voices 'I know, you're busy and I'm sorry for disturbing you' (*ich weiß du bis sehr busy und es tut mir leid dass ich dich stö:re* in lines 175–176) and 'I know it's the end of the workday soon, but could you, if it's no bother to you, check this and that (lines 177 and 179–181). She affords dimensions of being involved in work and tasks (being 'busy') and apology as preface for asking a favor (*es tut mir leid*, line 176), with reference to time (*feierabend* 'end of the workday'). She includes expressions of mitigation: *eventuell* ('possibly') and *wenns auch gar keine umstände macht* ('if it really doesn't cause you any inconvenience'). What she describes here are in traditional analyses of politeness theory verbal strategies to mitigate a negative face threat, i.e., not interfering with the desire of the interlocutors to be independent (Brown & Levinson 1987: 66 & 70). She marks the represented voice as a "metrically contrastive text segment" (Agha 2005: 43), demarcating transparently the boundaries to the co-text. The represented voice constitutes what I call here the persona of "Japanese working self" that asks a co-worker to check something for the speaker.

The lexical level is one resource of voicing that she uses to construct a stereotypical way for doing a mundane activity at the workplace—asking for a favor in Japanese. However, Nina adds another layer of prosodic modulation to her narration. This draws us into a scene that she experiences as time-consuming and, emergingly, as frustrating. Her narration involves a parallel rhythmic structure (text) that is built on a rising stress on *weiß, busy, leid, störe* ('[I] know, busy, sorry, [I] disturb'). In this example of voicing, Nina performs a presentation of the narrated speakers' epistemic stance, framed with 'I know'. The structural poetic configuration is exemplified below (Example 6.2).

Example 6.2. Poetic configuration of asking for a favor in Japanese

175	ja	es-	ich	weiß		du bis sehr	busy
176	und	es tut	mir	leid	dass	ich dich	stö:re

The enumeration is expanded with stress on *feierabend* and *eventuell* and culminates with higher volume and stress on *wenns auch gar keine umstände macht*. I produce continuers in lines 178 & 180, allowing space for Nina to expand her narrative. Her intonation (lines 175–177) also resembles Japanese conventions in spoken discourse when asking for a favor in workplace contexts. This scene illustrates how time-consuming and lengthy such activities are when the normative sufficiency of politeness is required.

Nina follows up and compares communicating in Japanese again with English.

Extract 6.7: Wischiwaschi

183	NI:	und im- beim englischen team is so	*and in- with the English team it's*
184		((neutral voice)) ja ich habe das un das gemacht.	*((neutral voice)) yes, I've done this and that*
185		bitte check das bis morgen. ende.	*please check that by tomorrow. end.*
186	FL:	[mhm	*[mhm*
187	NI:	[ne also du muss halt (.) nich so dieses wischiwaschi drumherum,	*[no well you must just (.) don't do this wishy-washy,*
188	FL:	okay= =ja.=	*okay= =yeah.=*
189	NI:	=!packen,!= =um deine bitte zu ne?	*=!wrap around,!= =to y'know*
190	FL:	mhm.	*mhm.*
191	NI:	nochmal in höflicher zu verpacken.	*pack your request in an even more polite way.*
192		das machts: finde ich die kommunikation im englischen	*that's: I think makes the communication in english*
193		(.) einfacher und schneller,=	*easier and faster,=*
194	FL:	=mhm.	*=mhm.*
195	NI:	al:s: im japanischen.	*tha:n: in japanese.*
196	FL:	oka:y.=	*oka:y.=*

She compares communicative practices, again using constructed speech. This time, she illustrates who a request for checking work would sound in English. She uses a neutral voice with less changes in pace, volume, and register. The voice register she uses in this example builds a perceivable or salient contrast to the previous example in which she voiced Japanese communicative practices. Both instances of voicing are transported into German discourse. Comparison is semiotically achieved through prosody.

The request for checking is referred to again here, but in English it is shorter than in Japanese, with less indirect phrasing and fewer prefaced hedges. The shortness is metapragmatically emphasized with *ende* (line 185). In the way she presents it here, communication in English appears to be shorter, more direct (*bitte check das*, 'please check this' in line 185), and with clear indications for deadlines (*bis morgen*, 'by tomorrow' in line 185). For Nina, simple is "normal." And her preference for conciseness might reflect a tendency in English and German discourse to rely on positive facework, i.e., the wish to be recognized as competent and professional.

In this segment from the interview, Nina and I exhibit sequences of high involvement in conversation with frequent turn-latching which is prominent in lines 188–189. She also invites my alignment with *ne* (line 189). I produce a continuer (line 186), and Nina lists advantages of easier communication in English compared to Japanese. In English you do not need to wrap your requests with vagueness to create politeness (lines 187–191). *Wischiwaschi* (line 187) is a colloquial expression for speech that appears a bit incoherent and not straightforward. It also involves an explicit affective stance, criticizing a somewhat careless approach toward task completion.

For Nina, English is a resource for phrasing requests in a short, clear, and efficient way. Phrasing requests politely is a central topic in ideological mediatization and depictions in materials for learners of Japanese (Grosser 2021). This contrasts with rather folk linguistic discourses that present *keigo* as a way to ensure *smooth communication* (Carroll 2005). At least for Nina, it is not as smooth as English style. She explicitly says that communicating in English is 'easier and faster' (lines 192–193) than communicating in Japanese (line 195). Two ideologies of communication emerge here: Neoliberal ideas about efficiency in workplace-related routines, and ideas about plain communication. In this segment, these two facets correspond, as Nina perceives a plain (no 'wishy-washy') way of communicating as more efficient. Nina allows another interpretation for her wish for quick and efficient communication at the workplace. In another part of the interview, she revealed to me that indirect communication and time-consuming ways to frame requests in Japanese sometimes cause her team to work over-time. She told me that she does not want to spend more time at the workplace than required for actual tasks. This echoes metapragmatic tropes of "German efficiency." At the same time, it could be possible that Nina emphasizes "the want to be efficient or urgent" (Brown & Levinson 1987: 68) in her formulation of requests.

Another example in which she voices communicative practices in Japanese comes later in the interview. In this example, she animates a for her typical way to make requests in Japanese. She also touches on the questions of how to voice one's opinions in discussions.

Extract 6.8: Ich versteh die verschiedenen blickwinkel

531	NI:	als im japanischen wo es sich eher anhört so nach dem motto	*in contrast to japanese where it sounds like*
532		ja:: wär nett wenn du das ma:chst	*ye::s would be nice if you'd do: it*
533		aber wenn dus nich machst >is auch okay.<	*but if not, >it's okay, too.<*
534	FL:	oka:y. [ja. mhm.	*oka:y. [yeah. mhm.*
535	NI:	[so ne von der kommunikation her.	*[yeah, communication-wise.*
536		das: war halt im englischen dann schon einfacher=	*tha:t was easier in english=*
537		=weil du direkt sagen konntes	*=because you could say directly*
538		(.) ich glaube nich wir sollten das so und so machen weil. ne.=	*(.) i don't think we should do it like this because. right. =*
539	FL:	=mhm. ja.	*=mhm. yeah.*
540	NI:	im japanisch ist es so	*in japanese it's so*
541		((imitates voice)) j:a::. ich versteh: die verschiedenen blickwinkel:,	*((imitates voice)) yea:h::. I understa:nd the different perspectives:,*
542		und andere teams sind ja auch busy:,	*and other teams are busy: too,*
543		aber wenn es !eventuell! möglich [wäre] wär es ganz nett. ne.=	*but !in case! it [would be] possible it would be quite nice. right.=*
544	FL:	[okay.]	*[okay.]*
545		=ja.	*=yeah.*
546	NI:	so nach dem motto und ich so so ja nein.	*along the lines of that and I'm like yeah no.*
547		so so geht's echt nich ne. das:	*like that really doesn't work. right. that:*
548	FL:	mhm.	*mhm.*
549	NI:	°ja.° schon schon praktisch wenn man dann zumindest noch auf	*°yeah.° quite quite convenient when you can at least (.)*
550		einer anderen sprache (.) kommunikazieren kann die direkter is.	*communicate in another language that is more direct.*

She uses another characterization of indirect communication in Japanese. She voices Japanese discourse again. She takes the position as the listening subject and explains what requesting sequences 'sound like in Japanese' (line 531). She cites one strategy to frame a request in Japanese. 'It would be nice if you did it' (*ja:: wär nett wenn du das ma:chst* in line 532), but there would be no consequences if it is not done (line 533). She addresses *denotational explicitness* and the degrees of transparent intentionality in the process of inferences about utterances. Nina layers a fast pace on *is auch ok* ('it's okay, too' line 533)

which emphasizes a vague expression of requests in Japanese. The request is immediately hedged by allowing the addressee not to behave in the requested way.

Nina then compares this Japanese approach to the English one once again. She says that it would be 'easier in English' (*im englischen dann schon einfacher* in line 536). The reason for that is, she continues, because you can directly state your opinion: *ich glaube nich wir sollten das so und so machen weil* ('i don't think we should do it like this because' in line 538). Stress on *weil* ('because') illustrates the affordances English style allows for voicing reasons against a proposal made by someone in an explicit and direct way. In her view, English allows for requests without mitigating a potentially face-threatening act (requesting), which she explicitly states here *weil du direkt sagen konntes* ('because you could say directly' in line 537). She uses the indexical *direkt(er)* ('[more] direct') as explicit label to characterize her perceptions of workplace discourse in English.

Nina then returns to voicing communicative style in Japanese (line 540). She transports stereotypical communication in Japanese workplace discourse into German interview discourse. In a stylized way, she mimics how at the Japanese workplace, colleagues would 'acknowledge different perspectives' (*j:a::. ich versteh: die verschiedenen blickwinkel:*, line 541) and the fact that 'other teams are busy, too' (*und andere teams sind ja auch busy:*, line 542). She animates negative politeness strategies that aim at not stepping onto the territory of others. At the same time, different perspectives are valued (though this could just be a routine formula). She sets a small scene that transports us into the busy project where expectations may clash. Even though everyone is busy, it is sometimes necessary to demand extra work.

She frames it in an implicit way and uses resources for mitigation. She uses a conditional construction with two conjunctive forms (*wenn es möglich [wäre] wär es*, 'if it would be potentially possible, it would be') and the hedge *eventuell* (line 543). This phrasing appeals to the other to be 'nice.' I register her utterance (lines 544–545). Nina then goes back to voicing how it is phrased in English. She presents a direct way of saying that it does not work out for her (lines 546–547). She cites herself, framing it with *ich so* ('I'm like' in line 546). Her constructed self-citation goes further in line 547 when she tells imagined others, *so geht's echt nich* ('that really doesn't work' in line 547). She presents English as a resource that bestows her entitlement to frankly decline an interlocutor's request, in contrast to Japanese. She then reflects on the advantages that English allows her to express her opinions more directly (lines 549–550). At the same time, it seems that she appreciates her multilingual repertoire. She is

able to draw on another language to express herself in times when competence in Japanese seems lacking or limited by normative conventions for expressing certain speech acts.

6.3.4 Inferring intentions

In her characterization of communicative practices at her Japanese workplace, Nina uses ascriptions of intentionality to explain how perspectives on these practices differ.

Extract 6.9: Zwischen den zeilen lesen

198	FL:	verstehe. (.) hm::.=	*got it. (.) mh::.=*
199	NI:	=vor allem da japanisch halt eher so:	*=especially because Japanese is more li:ke*
200		((1,8)) <nich> straight forward is,	*((1,8)) <not> straight forward,*
201	FL:	mhm. =	*mhm. =*
202	NI:	=sondern immer so dieses ja man (.) !erwartet dass der andere:!	*=but always like, yeah you (.) !expect the other per:son!*
203		zwischen den ↑zeilen lesen kann↓ →um zu wissen	*to ↑read between the lines↓ →to know*
204		was man [wirklich möchte← statt einfach zu sagen was man will.	*what you [really want← instead of just saying what you want.*
205	FL:	[mhm.	*[mhm.*

Nina continues to reflect on communicative practices in Japanese. She starts to characterize these practices with 'especially, because Japanese is like' (*vor allem da japanisch halt eher so:* in line 199). She pauses to think and then slowly continues her turn. She claims that Japanese is 'not straightforward' (line 200). She makes use of the English expression 'straightforward' here, metalanguage and object language become congruent.

After I produce a continuer (line 201) she continues establishing a contrast between English and Japanese, now turning to Japanese where 'people' (*man*) expect others to 'read between the lines' (line 202–203) in order to know 'what they really want' (lines 203–204). Like in her previous narrative, Nina uses the hedge *ja* to frame citations. Here, she presents a scene in which people at the workplace (but perhaps also in Japanese discourse in other contexts) use indirect communication. Only if the listener achieves the act of reading between the lines, can they infer what the other 'really wants' (line 204). She puts stress on 'expect,' while 'reading between the lines' is framed with a high-low intonational contour that may iconically trace the process of jumping between lines to understand the other. The skill of reading between the lines might also require extra effort from L2 users of Japanese.

Nina's speech is getting louder in line 202, but in my recollection of the interview, this could also be attributed to her re-positioning of her body, leaning forward to the recording device. The following turn 'to know what they really want' is layered with a long spectrum of intonational contour, starting high, but not as high as in the segment that is marked with the high arrow. She keeps a relatively high intonation here and slowly lowers it gradually until it reaches the baseline before *statt* in line 204. 'Instead,' she would prefer people to just 'say what they want' (line 204), putting stress on 'say.' *Einfach* ('simple/easy/plain,' but here rather translated as 'just') emerges here again as an indexical pointing to communicative practices that are characterized by a more direct approach. She refers to *explicit vs implicit* and *direct vs indirect* differentiations in languages that are associated with communicative practices in different cultures—and raised to *metapragmatic stereotypes* (Agha 2007a: 154).

With this distinction, she addresses the issue of intentionality and, more specifically, mind-guessing. To know what the other really wants could be related to knowing if and how they ask someone for a favor. The speech act she is primarily concerned with is embedded within her narrative in the examples presented in this subsection. It alludes that taking a reflexive stance toward other's intentions is even an *obligation* in Japanese discourse.[63] It is indicated by the recurrent verb *erwarten* ('to expect'). However, Nina displays a stance that favors denotational explicitness, which is metapragmatically construed as directness in talk—to provide an allegedly direct access to intentions, wishes, or desires for the interlocutor. She continuously makes this issue relevant in these segments of the interview.

She can draw on my presumed knowledge of communicative practices in Japanese, English, and German discourse. On the structural surface level, the question of how to appropriately frame and phrase the act of asking for a favor is answered with *keigo*. However, as her talk reveals, this issue is broader than a focus on form and how to grammatically encode requests via honorifics. Rather it is a recreation of roles that yield expectations from individuals to behave in alignment with their role (Obana & Haugh 2023, see also Agha 2007a on a semiotic conceptualization of *role alignment*).

Scaling out from this level, we can see that her narrative is at the intersection of cultural discourses about communicative practices. Being indirect is associated with communicative

[63] Some connections can be drawn here to Archer's (2012) work on reflexivity, implying that under late modern conditions, subjects are obliged to exercise iterative circles of reflexive deliberation if they want to succeed in life. In Nina's case, inferring other's intentions and transparent communication may be her strategy to legitimately participate in the Japanese working life.

strategies (Certeau 2013 [1974]) in Japanese. They are called *strategies* here, following de Certeau, as individuals follow prescribed communicative routines that emanate from and circulate via institutional power. To succeed at the workplace, Nina makes efforts to understand and reproduce this norm when communicating with her coworkers (*adequation* sensu Bucholtz & Hall 2004). In contrast to Japanese, she portrays communication in English as more 'straightforward' and therefore less time-consuming. This also echoes dominant discourses about communicative practices in German, as German workplace discourse is often perceived as direct.[64]

Her frustration with working at a Japanese company mirrors a conflict between adjusting to communicative norms and taking a critical stance toward them. She gives another example a few seconds later. Here, she talks about how to deal with customer queries.

Extract 6.10: Einen schritt weiterdenken

296	NI:	=auch so dieses diesen einen schritt ↑weiterdenken?	*=also like this- this thinking one step ↑ahead?*
297	FL:	mhm.=	*mhm.=*
298	NI:	=halt wenn wir eine kundenanfrage haben	*=like when we get a customer request,*
299		und jemand hat ein proble:m und	*and someone has a proble:m and*
300		dann löst (du) das problem weil du weißt schon	*then (you) solve the problem because you already know*
301		ungefähr okeh, das nächste problem könnte halt so und so sein,=	*roughly, okay, the next problem might be this or that,=*
302	FL:	=mhm.	*=mhm.*
303	NI:	wenn du es dann reinschreibst, kommt dann von den kollegen so	*and when you write that ((in the chat)), then the colleagues go like,*
304		ja, aber danach hat der kunde doch gar nicht gefragt,	*yeah, but the customer didn't ask about that.*
305	NI:	°°ich so°° ja: [aber	*°°and I'm like°° yea:h [but*
306	FL:	[okay mhm.	*[okay mhm.*
307	NI:	aber dann muss der kunde nicht noch ma:l eine anfrage stellen	*but if so the customer doesn't have to make ano:ther request,*
308		weil es zu achtzig prozent klar dass dieses problem bald eintreten wird ne.=	*because it eighty percent clear that this problem will come up soon, right?=*

[64] There are several speculations about how such an image was created. I assume a strong influence of the metadiscourse about German behavior. In my own encounters, especially in Japan, people often told me that their impression of German discourse was rather direct and straight to the point. Schröder's (2010) cross-cultural pragmatic study provides some support for this insight, as she found that German speakers tend to place emphasis on the *referential* and *metalinguistic* functions of language. I am cautious, however, to ascribe this as a sole motivator for Nina's characterization of communicative practices in the interview.

309	FL:	=mhm. ja.	*=mhm. yeah.*
310	NI:	so im japanisch. so ja. wenn du nach a: gefragt wirst	*like in Japanese. like, yeah. when you're asked about a:,*
311		beantwortest du halt auch nur a:.	*you just answer a:, and that's it.*
312	FL:	mhm.	*mhm.*
313	NI:	ne.	*right.*
314	FL:	$voll.$	*$exactly.$*
315	NI:	$ne.$	*$right.$*
316	FL:	$ja.$ okay. also: orientieren sich (.)	*$yeah.$ okay. so: then they rather just orient (.)*
317		die sich dann wirklich mehr an dem was eigentlich dann nur (.)	*really to what is just being asked somehow (.)*
318		irgendwie gefragt wird und:, denken dann irgendwie nicht	*and; then they don't really think*
319		noch einen schritt [weiter,	*another step [ahead,*
320	NI:	[ja so dieses einen schritt weiterdenken ist	*[yeah that thinking one step ahead thing is*
321		<nich so>	*<not really>*
322	FL:	okay.=	*okay.=*
323	NI:	=stark verbreitet hab ich festgestellt,	*=very common, I've found,*
324			

She starts with the issue at hand, to 'think one step ahead' (*einen schritt ↑weiterdenken* in line 296). It describes a cognitive process in which we anticipate future scenarios and take actions to influence them. Nina highlights *weiterdenken* ('think ahead') with high-rising pitch. In what follows, she expands on the context. She sets the scene, a situation where they receive a customer query with a problem (lines 298–299), and then solve the problem (line 300). However, she describes how she anticipates another problem that could occur in the next step (line 301). Therefore, she wants to add a remark or possible solution to it (line 303). She then shifts the scene to a brief interaction with her colleagues. She introduces her colleague's words with *kommt dann von den kollegen so* ('then my colleagues are like' line 303). They point out that what she is writing does not concern the customer's question, she frames it with constructed dialogue (line 304). She presents her colleagues' thoughts to be more concerned with dealing with the actual request and additional information is regarded as divergent. These different approaches to responding to an inquiry and show different approaches to work-related procedures.

Nina continues constructing the dialogue, now citing herself who justifies her approach to include additional information for the client. Prefacing her self-citation with *°°ich so°° ja:* ('I'm like yeah' in line 305), she anticipates a future interaction with the customer, who has to

file another query (line 307), because another problem is likely to occur (line 308). Nina gives an eighty percent chance that this problem will occur. Her citation of interaction at the workplace illustrates small tensions that occur. While certainly an issue with a communicative dimension, the problem she presents here is about workplace socialization and individual approaches to solving tasks in customer support. Nina's epistemic stance exhibits her experience in dealing with prior queries. This allows her to put herself into the mind of the customer. She wants to pre-empt consecutive issues. She criticizes her colleagues' way of approaching the problem. She paraphrases the issue, 'when asked about a, you only answer a' (lines 310–311). In this way, she characterizes her colleagues' who deal only with the actual problem at hand.[65] However, we could also interpret her colleagues' responses as ways not to undermine the customers' competence in articulating the issue in the inquiry. What Nina might perceive as a committed and attentive working style, could also be perceived as overstepping a boundary of the competent autonomy of the client.

I register Nina's explanation of work style (line 312. She adds a token of emphasis (line 313). I take this as an invitation to add more emphasis, too (*voll* 'exactly' in line 314), smiling, as I sense the potential issue. At the same time, I build alignment with Nina and her characterization of communication. She uses repetition of *ne* ('right' in line 313) to build on this alignment, with smiling voice.

The example Nina gives here is about work-related procedures, specifically 'thinking ahead'—a way of anticipating future scenarios when dealing with customers' inquiries. Through this example, she positions herself as someone with a more customer-oriented and anticipating attitude at the workplace, in contrast to her Japanese colleagues. When taking the broader interview context into account, we see that she presents reflexivity to me, in a move to build a stance of alterity toward her colleagues and their communicative practices.

I ask a bit further, summarizing what she told me about her colleagues' work style. Struggling a bit to phrase my question, I ask for confirmation, if her colleagues only oriented to what was actually asked (lines 316–318). Following up, I try to confirm if they did not think one step ahead (lines 318–319). Nina quickly takes over the floor and agrees, saying that she has noticed that 'thinking one step ahead is not so prevalent' (lines 320–323). Slower pace on *nich so* ('not so' in line 321) allows me to insert a continuer (*okay* in line 322), before she

[65] In her parlance, her colleagues only deal with problem 'a,' while Nina also considers possible problems and solutions to subsequent problem 'b.'

finishes her turn. This continuer establishes alignment with her. I take up the key indexical expression here *weiterdenken* that Nina uses to compare and characterize different approaches to task-solving at her workplace. Alongside reading between the lines, there is another communicative issue. While the latter is expected instead of direct approaches, when dealing with customer inquiries, she notices that her colleagues only reply to the question that was asked. Both issues anchor in different understandings of intersubjective processes, the continuous attempts to make sense of the other, to read their mind—in other words, to *infer intentions*. The analysis of these examples shows that her ascriptions of intentionality are resources for stancetaking and means to position herself as somebody with a working style different from that of her colleagues—or even superior, because of her commitment to solving potential future issues. This style includes different approaches to direct communication and written interaction with customers. Nina construes these differences as grounded in subjective experiences, for example, being a migrant in Japan. I explore this aspect in the next section.

6.3.5 Foreign intersubjectivities

In our interviews and interactions outside this context, Nina told me that she sometimes has the impression that Japanese co-workers do not know what it feels like to live and work in a foreign country, with a language one has acquired later in life. She has formed this impression based on interactions with her co-workers. As I will show in the next examples, she makes such an inference from difficulties in understanding and expressibility—making oneself understood to the other. In this narration, she offers me an insight into her perception of social relations at the workplace. This is not only an account of her thoughts about her co-workers and communicative practices but an account of how she takes an affective stance and reflects on her current situation and being in Japan. Nina considers competence in a foreign language to be crucial for understanding the subjective experience of migrants, as becomes evident in the following extract.

Extract 6.11: Vernünftig kommunizieren können

570	FL:	hmm. gäbe es denn konsequenzen: wenn, wenn du das-	*hmm. would there be any consequences: if you-*
571		also wenn du irgendwie ein falsches zeichen verwenden	*like if you'd use a wrong character*

572		würdest oder (.) so?	*or (.) something like that?*
573	NI:	n::: ich glaube (.) n:ein das nich.	*n::: I think (.) n:o not really.*
574	FL:	mhm.	*mhm.*
575	NI:	aber ich finde (.) gerade als ausländer in ner japanischen firma (.)	*but I think (.) especially as a foreigner at a Japanese company (.)*
576		<willst du schon (.) vernünftig kommunizieren [können.>	*<you really (.) want to be able [to communicate properly.>*
577	FL:	[mhm.	*[mhm.*
578	NI:	>ich mein< viele bei uns in der firma, (.)	*>I mean< many people in our company (.)*
579		können halt nicht wirklich englisch.	*just can't really speak English.*
580	FL:	okay.	*okay.*
581	NI:	ehm:, (.) und >ich glaube< wenn du keine wirkliche zweitsprache:	*ehm:, (.) and >I think< if you don't really*
582		(.) beherrschst oder lernst, ehm (.)	*know a second la:nguage (.) or learn one, ehm (.)*
583		können glaube ich viele auch nicht einschätzen wie du (.)	*I think many also can't quite judge how you (.)*
584		<einfacher also wie du sehr simpel in deiner> muttersprache kommunikazierst.	*<plainly like how you communicate in a very simple way> in your native language*
585	FL:	mhm.	*mhm.*

After Nina tells me about her concerns with language use at the workplace, I ask if there would be any consequences for making mistakes at her workplace (lines 570–572). I restart my question several times, as I am a bit hesitant to address the topic of linguistic sanctioning. I suggest 'a wrong character' as one example for potential mistakes (*ein falsches zeichen* in lines 571–572). Nina says that she does not think there would be consequences (line 573). However, she also states that 'as a foreigner in a Japanese company, you want to communicate appropriately' (lines 575–576). This turn as well as her following turns are characterized by slower pace and more micro-pauses. In contrast to her rather fast-paced evaluation of communicative practices in Japanese, Nina takes more time to reflect on her own subject position as an international worker in a Japanese company. 'Communicating appropriately' is a concern for her, especially in Japanese, even though she is critical of some communicative routines when making requests to her colleagues. This aligns with Katharina's view (Extract 3.3)

In the following turn, she rationalizes her concern. One reason why she wants to be able to communicate appropriately in Japanese is because it is the main medium of communication with many of her colleagues at the company. 'Many of them cannot really speak English' (lines 578–579). She intensifies investment in her stance with *ich mein* ('I mean'

in line 578, Kiesling 2020) in faster pace. Simultaneously, this discourse marker also creates alignment with her narrating self in the previous turn, where she indicates that she makes efforts to communicate in Japanese. The intensified investment prefacing her statement about her co-worker's inability to use English also invites another interpretation that she shows consideration toward them. In this sequence, she makes her position as an L2 user at a Japanese company relevant. At the same time, she tells me that she can resort to English to quickly solve an issue, but this is not as easy for her colleagues. Consequently, Japanese has to be used. German or other languages are no options. I use *okay* here to show that I register this new information (line 580).

Nina continues and shifts the perspective, now speaking from the other's point of view, i.e., the Japanese colleagues who cannot speak English. She tells me how for people who are not fluent in a second language nor not learning one, are not able to assess how to communicate in an easy way in their mother tongue (lines 581–584). Being able to learn and use second language, for her, is a gateway to reflecting on communicative behavior in one's own 'mother tongue' (*muttersprache* in line 584; see also Kramsch 2009: 71). Nina contextualizes the issue of understanding here. We can assume that because her colleagues do not communicate in a simple form of Japanese, it is her who needs to adjust her Japanese.[66]

In another part of the interview, Nina tells me that she would use easy German with people who are non-native speakers. In her view, her Japanese colleagues show less accommodating behavior toward her (as L2 user of Japanese). Nina rationalizes this, suggesting they are inexperienced in engaging with different languages and cultures. Another possible interpretation here could be that they acknowledge her as a legitimate speaker of Japanese and therefore do not use simple or simplified language with her. In summary, Nina makes a generalized experience relevant and expands on her account in the following extract.

Extract 6.12: Ich weiß nich was du von mir wills

601	NI:	[ja ja das ist mein chef, klar. der kann englisch soweit	*[yeah yeah that's my boss, sure. he can speak English to some extent*
602		aber er benutzt es so gut wie ga:r nich.	*but he pretty much ne:ver uses it.*
603	FL:	okay,	*okay,*

[66] Researchers and practitioners in Japanese language education have been suggesting that native speakers of Japanese need to "re-learn" Japanese to embrace a more inclusive stance toward diverse Japanese users (Yoshinaga 2015). This approach is part of the critical engagement with the concept and method of *yasashii nihongo* ('plain / easy Japanese'). See Kimura (2019) for a discussion on the utility of this approach.

604	NI:	und wenn er- selbst meine japanischen kollegen sind manchmal so	*and when he- even my Japanese colleagues are sometimes like,*
605		ich <weiß nich was er gerade einem mitteilen will?>	*I <don't know what he's trying to say right now?>*
606		weil sein japanisch halt dann irgendwie komisch ist,	*because his Japanese is kind of odd,*
607		und als ausländer is es auch so f::: (.) oka:y.	*and as a foreigner, it's like f::: (.) oka:y.*
608		>ich weiß nicht was du von mir wills. so $ungefähr.$<	*>I have no idea what you want from me. like $roughly.$<*
609	FL:	okay.	*okay.*
610	NI:	ja. >da merkt man dann manchmal schon<	*yeah. >you can sometimes really tell<*
611		wer wirklich halt ↑kontakt zu ausländern hat	*who actually has ↑contact with foreigners*
612		und andere sprachen im alltag benutzt.	*and uses other languages in everyday life.*
613	FL:	mhm	*mhm*
614	NI:	und wer halt wirklich sehr daran gewöhnt ist	*and who's really just very used to*
615		>nur in seiner muttersprache mit muttersprachlern zu kommunizieren.<	*>only communicating in their native language with other natives.<*
616	FL:	okay. mhm. ((0,8))	*okay. mhm. ((0,8))*

Nina talks about her boss who can speak English (line 601), but almost never uses it (line 602). The issue seems to be, however, his directions in Japanese. Even Japanese colleagues, the people she holds as a benchmark for competence in Japanese, sometimes cannot understand him (line 604–605). She cites their voice, this time in a slower place, as a question. Even Japanese colleagues are voiced to have trouble understanding their boss' Japanese sometimes. The reason for that is his 'weird Japanese' (line 606). Nina uses *komisch* ('odd') in other examples (see the following section) as an index for mistakes. In this context, such an interpretation could apply. What is more salient here, however, is the stance that indexes discordance in interpersonal relationships in the workplace. Trouble in understanding seems to be the source of this struggle. Nina speculates that these struggles are grounded in limited experience in communicating with people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

In the next turn, she voices the perspective of the 'foreigner' (*ausländer* in line 607) who has trouble understanding the boss, indicated with a sound of resignation and non-understanding (*f:::*). She addresses the boss in imagination: 'I don't know what you want from me' (*ich weiß nicht was du von mir wills* in line 608) in a faster pace. In these segments, she outlines a path from slow questioning to fast assertion that understanding is not achieved. 'Like this / roughly' (line 608) is framed with smiley voice, contextualizing this mundane conflict in an international workplace.

Nina presents this experience as indicator to discern who is in exchange with foreigners and uses languages other than Japanese in everyday life (lines 610–612). This segment is marked with a higher pitch, making it into a segment expressing doubt. Nina describes how, for her, such situations indicate who is used to only communicate with other native speakers in their native language (lines 614–615).[67] This segment is uttered at a faster pace. Here she refers to *Japanese*, the language as well as the speakers. It echoes the ideology of Japan as a monolingual nation where everyone can expect the same competences in the standard language from their interlocutors (Heinrich 2012). Nina describes how people who mainly interact in such a dominantly monolingual context do not know how to deal with people with a presumably limited repertoire in Japanese. At the same time, Nina again aligns with the persona of a multilingual and transnational individual who enacts their expertise on *language work*, which will be discussed in the last section of the analysis.

6.3.6 Language work

A major part of her experience at the Japanese workplace is to mediate between languages. She oversees English requests or queries from English-speaking clients but also communicates in Japanese with customers and coworkers. While German is her native language and the language she feels most comfortable in, she perceives herself—and is also perceived by her coworkers—as a competent user of English. Nina is in charge of what she calls *übersetzungssachen* ('translation things/issues'). In her case, translations from Japanese into English, but part of her work also includes checking translations done by her colleagues. But *übersetzungssachen* is ambiguous. One the one hand, it involves actual translations, and checking existing translations made from Japanese to English. On the other hand, it applies to her introspective translation or mediation, when she makes a bridge between norms in English or German discourse and norms at the Japanese workplace.

In the following example, she tells me about how the English and Japanese version of the website receive different levels of prioritization from the employees. Nina expresses her critique on how Japanese customers are favored.

[67] Refer to my discussion of the problems with these concepts in Theor Section 3.5.3.

Extract 6.13: Ein bisschen arm

395	NI:	man merkt halt dass die japanischen kunden schon irgendwo	*you can just tell that the Japanese customers are kind of*
396		↑bevorzugt werden,↓	*↑favored,↓*
397	FL:	o[kay.	*o[kay.*
398	NI:	[weil halt auf dem japanischen store	*[because on the Japanese store*
399		du hast halt nicht ein typo oder ne.	*there's not a single typo or you know*
400		[irgendwas was komisch aussieht.	*[anything that looks odd.*
401	FL:	[hmhm.	*[hmhm.*
402	NI:	und auf dem englischen store.	*and on the English store,*
403		als ich mir das erst mal durchgelesen dachte ich mir so	*when I read through it the first time I was just like*
404		>also für eine englischsprachige ↑seite,↓< (.)	*>I mean for an English-language ↑site,↓< (.)*
405		ist das schon [n bisschen	*it's kind of [a bit-*
406	FL:	[@oh okay@	*[@oh okay@*
407	NI:	es ist schon ein bisschen !a:rm! ne	*it's kind of a bit !ba:d! right*
408		also englisch was nicht wirklich richtig is,	*like English that isn't really correct,*
409		oder teilweise halt auch uralte informationen	*or sometimes also really outdated information*
410		die gar nicht mehr aktuell sind	*that's no longer up to date*
411	FL:	[m:::: okay]	*[m:::: okay]*
412	NI:	[weil halt] die priorität halt eine andere is	*[because] the priority's just somewhere else*
413		als das halt zu: verbessern. ne.	*than actually fi:xing that. you know.*

She voices her impression that Japanese customers are prioritized (lines 395–396). The segment that expresses this issue *bevorzugt werden* is framed with a high-low intonational curve. This becomes evident in the language used on the website. Nina says that in the Japanese version (line 398), 'there is not a single typo' (line 399) or 'something that looks odd' (line 400). She points out that—according to her perception—there are no mistakes on the Japanese website. The quality and linguistic correctness of the internet platform reflects her attitude toward valued customers.

Nina continues and compares the Japanese website with the English website (line 402), which seems to receive less attention to linguistic correctness. She describes the first time when she read through the website (line 403). She uses faster pace 'for an English website' (line 404) and an intonational contour on *seite* which indexes a doubtful stance toward this segment. This preface makes me anticipate what she wants to convey, as in the next turn, she continues with 'it is a bit' (line 405) which overlaps with my surprise that is framed with

laughter (*oh okay* line 406, where *oh* indicates my reception of new information; Heritage 1984a). I anticipate that she is going to negatively evaluate the quality of the English website. She evaluates it as 'a little bit poor,' with louder volume on *arm* (line 407). She elaborates on her evaluation, listing mistakes in English (line 408) and very 'old information' (lines 409–410). The two aspects include *form* as well as *content*. In the last two turns of this extract, she gives a potential reason for this situation. The priority in the company is not on the English presentation of the website (line 412), but rather on the Japanese one. Therefore, mistakes in the English version—grammatical as well as content-wise—are not corrected (line 413).

Her way of telling me about the treatment of the English website reveals her priorities. At a different point in this interview, she also explicitly tells me that for her, priorities are different. Nina equally values the English website and customers, even though profit from the English website is less. She takes a critical stance toward privileging Japanese customers. She positions herself as someone who can assess the quality of English of the website—thereby distancing herself from her colleagues who seem to have a limited competence in English and put less effort into the English presence of the website. At the same time, her stance mirrors her position as an international, non-Japanese individual in the company, who can draw on her multilingual repertoire and experience. She claims legitimacy in English at the workplace, where she sometimes encounters challenges in Japanese. The translations on the website were probably made before she entered the company. Her competence in evaluating the quality of translations on the website emerges through comparison. It extends over time, i.e., translations somebody made in the past, which are then revisited by her and improved. It also includes pragmatic competence to assess a translation and finding the correct expression, abiding to generic norms in the respective languages.

A bit later, she tells me more about her priorities in customer support.

Extract 6.14: Es wird nie passieren

455	NI:	ja. das ist manchmal ein bisschen schwierig da meine (.)	*yeah. it's sometimes a bit difficult because my (.)*
456		prioritäten- (.) ich setz halt andere sachen höher,	*priorities- (.) I just rank other things higher,*
457	FL:	mhm.	*mhm.*
458	NI:	weil ich mir denke ja, >!die seite ist! das was der kunde sieht.<	*because I think yeah, !the website is! what the customer actually sees.<*
459		dem ist ega:l ob wir ne am tag überstunden machen oder nicht.	*they don't ca:re whether we you know do overtime in a day or not.*

460		ich würde mir auch zweimal überlegen ob ich meine kreditkarte	*I'd also think twice about registering my credit card*
461		auf einer seite registriere wo das englisch komisch ist ne.=	*on a site where the English is weird, right.=*
462	FL:	=ja, das [stimmt.°mhm.°	*=yeah, that's [true.°mhm.°*
463	NI:	[weils halt ne.	*['cause, yeah.*
464		solche sachen halt. ne.	*things like that. you know.*
465		>wo ich mir denke< es gibt auch andere seiten und, (.)	*>where I think< there are other sites and, (.)*
466		>ich habe noch keine andere seite gesehen wo<	*>I haven't seen another site where<*
467		>das englisch nich perfekt is.<	*>the English isn't perfect.<*
468	FL:	[mhm.]	*[mhm.]*
469	NI:	[ne.] ja >das is so<	*[yeah.] yeah >it's like<*
470		ja::. *dim*°ja wenn wir zeit haben verändern- machen wir-	*yeah::. dim°yeah, when we have time we'll change- we'll make-*
471		gucken wir da darüber.° = >un ich denk mir nur so<	*we'll look into it.° = >and I'm just like<*
472		es wird ↑nie passieren.↓ [ne.	*it's ↑never gonna happen.↓[right.*
473	FL:	[okay. ja.	*[okay. yeah.*

Nina tells me how she 'ranks other things higher' (line 456). She presents the website as the flagship of the company. 'The website is what the customer sees' (*!die seite ist! das was der kunde sieht* in line 458), she emphasizes and frames this sentence with fast pace. In her view, 'the customer does not care about overwork' (*dem ist ega:l ob wir ne am tag überstunden machen* in line 459). Even if it takes more time, the website needs to appear in a professional—and this is what is important to Nina. She gives another reason for having a correct English language presence on the website. Correct English enhances the store's credibility. From her perspective, she would 'think twice about registering her credit card on a website where the English is odd' (lines 460–461). She makes a company's *accountability* for confidential treatment of personal data—such as credit card information—relevant. Nina claims that language *authenticates* (Bucholtz & Hall 2004) the company's identity and credibility.

I agree with her (line 462). Nina lists 'things like that' (*solche sachen*, line 464) as a summary of reasons to put more effort in linguistic correctness on the website. She counts in competitiveness, as there are other websites which customers can use to buy digital books (line 465). She introduces this with reported thought *wo ich mir denke* ('so I think to myself' in line 465). She also makes a generalization, as in her experience, the English on other websites is always perfect (lines 466–467). The competitive logics in a neoliberal economy so become authorized through linguistic refinement.

Finally, she moves on to voice her colleagues. She illustrates how they would change it, if they have time, or do something about it, or look over it (lines 470–471). The verbs she lists exhibit a decreasing level of agency—from changing, to acting, to just looking over the English website. This is emphasized through abrupt rephrasing after *verändern* ('change') and *machen wir* ('we do/make') and a slight decrease in pitch (*diminuendo*) over the two lines until *darüber* ('[look] over'). In her citation, Nina attributes a stance to her colleagues who regard the linguistic correctness of the English version of the website as less important in comparison with the Japanese webstore. In direct contrast to the voices of her colleagues, she reports her own thoughts again (*un ich denk mir nur so*, 'and I'm just like' in line 471). The contents of what she presents her as her thought is an evaluation. She evaluates the stance she attributes to her colleagues with high investment, saying that 'it's never gonna happen' (*es wird nie passieren* in line 472). She frames this utterance with a rising-falling intonational curve. This statement could be grounded in her prior experience of interacting with her colleagues. Her high commitment to this stance might index a higher epistemic status with respect to translation and quality of linguistic products. This stance indexes an alignment against her colleagues. She establishes a doubtful stance with regard to their attitude toward the English website by explicitly negating their statement. Her voice, invoked through self-citation, builds a contrast to the voices of her colleagues. She distances herself from her colleagues and the ways they prioritize and privilege the Japanese version of the website and its customers.

Linguistic correctness is the yardstick to which trustworthiness can be judged. She advocates for a *moral stance* (Goodwin 2007: 70) that is recognizable to customers who need to put some degree of trust into the company to engage in economic exchange. On the one hand, Nina favors and embraces a bilingually accessible platform. On the other hand, linguistic correctness emerges as a feature of her professional practice of a company that also wants to appeal to international customers who do not speak Japanese. It is part of her *professional vision* (Goodwin 1994) and her way of seeing through the eyes of English-speaking customers.

Because of her colleagues' indifference toward the English website, Nina took the initiative, checked and corrected the whole website herself. By telling me about her engagement with translations, she *enacts her expertise* (Carr 2010) as someone who takes responsibility and who holds entitlement to communicative mediation between languages at the company. Her enactment of expertise is established through displaying communicative

competence in evaluating, revising, and creating translations. It also emerges from her critical alignment toward her colleagues. However, to a certain extent, her expertise also seems to be acknowledged by her colleagues.

In these examples, Nina describes the translation of the website as a source of disparate opinions at her workplace. At first glance, it appears to be about language, but a close look at Nina's narrative reveals that issue expands to perceptions of how a company presents itself to customers and how different perspectives on professionality and multilingualism are valued within the company.

6.4 Discussion: Personae and practices in workplace narratives

Nina navigates the daily intricacies of communication at a Japanese workplace, juggling different registers, styles, and languages. In this discussion, I weave the threads from the analysis and discuss them in light of common issues that arise for internationals working at Japanese companies.

Nina's experience of communicative practices at the workplace can be characterized as balancing differences and adjusting to norms. These depend on structural affordances that different languages bear. Most relevant here are the *keigo* register as a set of morphosyntactic forms in Japanese and different tactics in English or Japanese discourse that are part of workplace interactions. In this analysis, Nina reflects upon making requests and giving opinions. She uses an array of resources to build her stances. Text-metricalization, such as the rhythmic configuration of indexes, as well as voicing and constructions of dialogue with her colleagues, customers, and herself feature prominently in her descriptions. She uses ascriptions of intentionality and expectations to scaffold her stance and calibrate her alignment with and against her narrated co-workers and their working style. Her competence reflects her capabilities for navigating communicative dynamics across spatiotemporal contexts, from workplace to interview.

Time is the indexical anchor mooring Nina's stances in the narrative. We can identify a propositional-evaluative stance toward request routines in professional discourse, and interactional stance within the narrative discourse in interview to illustrate her temporal experience. She uses indexical expressions referring to aspects of time, such as *zeit, schneller, sparen, busy, feierabend* ('time, faster, save, busy, end of workday'). To enact her experience of the workplace, she uses stress, parallelism, and rhythm that draw the listener into the scene,

along with double-voicing that creates image of what workplace discourse sounds like for her.

6.4.1 Style, efficiency, and transparency

For Nina, working at a Japanese company is an experience of languages, registers, and styles. In her narrative, she reveals to me her rationalization process, the ways of making sense of her experiences by gauging the resourcefulness or the functional value of her communicative resources at the workplace. Communicative norms in Japanese are time-consuming. Focusing on form comes at the expense of focusing on function. Previous studies on L2 speakers have shown "that L2 speakers may not only be 'excused' from *keigo*, but may also be actively discouraged from pursuing *keigo* proficiency" (Takeuchi 2023b: 59, emphasis in original) in workplace contexts. Some learners of Japanese also think that Japanese do not expect them to master *keigo*, as Armour (2001: 14) reports. However, Nina makes a sharp distinction between normal Japanese and *keigo*, trying to accommodate to norms that she observes from her colleagues. We can interpret the effort to align with these normative practices of using *keigo* as an attempt to claim legitimacy as a user of Japanese at her company. Nevertheless, she doubts the "smoothness" that has ideologically been ascribed to using *keigo* (Carroll 2005). While adjusting to norms of politeness at the workplace, she is critical of time-consuming ways of communicating. I understand politeness as a concept Nina explicitly refers to in her characterization of communicative practices.

Efficiency and a mind for optimizing processes at the workplace are inscribed into her body. This attitude towards work figures in her language portrait which shows a distinction between registers of Japanese in her head. She projects herself as a multilingual speaker with the metapragmatic competence to reflect on languages, by comparing different conventions to carry out speech acts in English and Japanese.

Keigo, however, is not the only aspect of communicative style that Nina is concerned with. She subscribes to an ideology of *transparency of communication* that is entextualized in the interview through activation of indexicals from a field of *in/directness*. Popular and stereotypical descriptions of Japanese have pointed out Japanese communicative behavior as indirect (for an overview, see Miller 1994: 38). I treat *in/direct* here as metapragmatic labels that emerge from Nina's narrative, not as descriptions of a degree of transparency of

patterned communicative styles.[68] She prefers direct and straightforward communication with her colleagues—and for her, English serves this function. In contrast, she characterizes Japanese communicative style as opaque, "whishy-washy," and vague. This impression is built on her observation of the oftentimes longer and more complex structures of messages on the workplace messenger. It also features in her narrative when she talks about her occasional troubles in understanding her superior. In other words, this impression is based on her lived experience.

6.4.2 Subjectivity and ideologies

Nina's experience is grounded in her subject position. She is someone with a repertoire different from that of her coworkers. This grants entitlement to exert authority in assessing translations into English at her workplace. The capacity to do so emerges in exchange with her coworkers. Her competence or expertise as a translator is socially valued at the workplace and institutionally authorized. However, her competence only gains value once Nina defies the unequal treatment of languages and customers by directing more attention to improving the English language version of the company's webstore. In contrast to some multinationals (e.g., Millar 2017), English has a lower value at her company, as this company is mainly catering to Japanese-speaking customers. This aligns with insights from other multinational companies in Japan (Fairbrother 2015a).

Subjectivation takes place at her workplace, in collegial engagement with her multilingual repertoire, where her resources align with emergent multilingualization of services provided by her company. She is *made into* a multilingual professional at this space. Therefore, she is positioned as someone with certain qualities and competences to carry out language work. At the same time, she also positions herself as someone with a higher competence in implementing infrastructures to address English-reading customers more professionally, in contrast to her Japanese colleagues. However, her job is not that of a translator per se, but rather a feature or even tacit expectation that comes with her position as a non-Japanese employee in customer support, especially since she deals with requests from customers who do not speak Japanese. Nina's lived experience of languages at the

[68] For a critique on the analytical concepts of *in/directness* as language ideologies, see also Silverstein (2010).

workplace is set in a *metadiscursive regime* (Bauman & Briggs 2003; Park 2013) that describes the policies, managements, and structuration of practices of talking about language and communication.

The reproduction of *ideologies* of competence works on various levels within this regime. First, we can see a reproduction of generic norms at the workplace, in particular Nina's convergence to *keigo* norms—while also being critical of its function. Second, the reproduction of orders of communicative competences, where communicative competences are variably hierarchized (prioritizing Japanese over English, for example). And third, the reproduction of cultural stereotypes about personae and practices (Japanese people who communicate in an indirect and overly polite way). Competences and perceptions thereof are never equitably evaluated—they are ordered and hierarchized (e.g., the idea that Japanese people would not be good at English or English speakers that prefer efficient and direct communication). Blommaert (2007: 2) calls this organization of signs *orders of indexicality*. As explained in the Theory Chapter Section 3.5.2, repertoires always incorporate competences and perceptions of resources. Therefore, repertoires are also subject to this ordering, or, in other words, to such metadiscursive regimentation that gives rise to the articulation of ideologies. Ideologies may be rooted in wide-shared observations of actual proficiency in expressing oneself in a language. However, they become stabilized in the interview context through reiterations of dominant discourses about competence in language at the workplace. These discourses emerge because individuals' repertoires are truncated (Blommaert 2010: 103–106), they consists of resources with different social, emotional, and functional values.

6.4.3 Rhythm and voicing as competence in narrative

Rhythm and intonation index Nina's competence in her performance of workplace communication (Bauman & Briggs 1990: 77; see also Briggs 1988). In her performance, she exhibits competence to decontextualize discourse at her workplace and recontextualize it within her narrative of communicative practices. This observation demonstrates that competence is a multi-level emergent phenomenon, with both a denotational-metapragmatic perspective—i.e., talking about competence and perceptions of language use—and an indexical-metapragmatic perspective—i.e., Nina's dexterous use of voice and stylistic devices to present scenes in which competence is at issue. Particularly salient are instances of

(double-)voicing, citation of her own thoughts and others' voices. She uses "[p]rosodic devices, such as high register, increase of volume and tempo, and rising-falling intonation […]" (Günthner 2002: 351), which has been reported for speakers of German who construct dialogues with citational practices. Nina's rhythms "involve the audience with the speaker or writer and the discourse by sweeping them along, much as music sweeps listeners along, luring them to move in its rhythm" (Tannen 2006: 600). From an interactional perspective, both speakers (in this chapter, interviewer and interviewee) exhibit features of a high involvement style (Tannen 2005 [1984], 2007 [1989]). These features include fast pace and swift turn-taking, latching and overlapping of turns, and constructed dialogue. Such an involvement indexes established rapport and builds a fundament on which Nina narratively unfolds her presentation of experiences at the Japanese workplace.

Rhythm and intonation build a metrical text that adds a layer of meaning to denotational content. While serving as indices for Nina's performance as a narrator, the text can be construed as a representation of experiences (Ochs 2012), changes in rhythm of life, and comparison of different workflows. The examples show how competence becomes perceivable for the listening subject across events and languages.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has delved into Nina's experiences as an international L2 user of Japanese in a Japanese workplace, providing insights into how communicative competence is perceived and navigated in a professional environment. By exploring Nina's daily mediation between languages and registers, this analysis underscores the challenges faced by L2 speakers in contexts where linguistic expectations are governed by norms, particularly the use of honorifics (*keigo*). Nina's story highlights a central issue for many international workers in Japan: the tension between linguistic competence and the demands of workplace efficiency.

One of the key findings of this thesis is the multifaceted nature of communicative competence in the workplace. For Nina, competence is not merely about mastering linguistic forms, such as *keigo*, but about navigating the broader dynamics of language as a social resource. Her ability to switch between languages—Japanese, English, and German—while making sense of and negotiating communicative norms at her workplace reveals how multilingual individuals mediate between different cultural and institutional expectations. As

Nina illustrates, competence is shaped not only by formal training but also by the continuous negotiation of communicative practices in a multilingual professional setting.

Nina's narrative also highlights the ideological work that is inherent in the process of establishing legitimacy as an L2 speaker of Japanese. Through her own metapragmatic reflections on language, she distances herself from both the alleged inefficiency and perceived rigidity of Japanese workplace norms and the linguistic indifference of her colleagues. This reflects broader issues of language inequality and the unequal valuation of linguistic resources within corporate environments in Japan. While insertional use of English is often perceived as an index of professionalism in business contexts (Saito 2020), English is valued lower or not prioritized in the case of Nina's company.

Ultimately, this analysis contributes to the overarching research questions of this thesis. It is one example that contributes to our understanding of how international L2 users of Japanese perceive their communicative competence, emphasizing that competence is not a fixed or static concept but a dynamic and context-dependent phenomenon. Particular relevant to Nina's perceived notion of competence are politeness practices and comparison of pragmatic strategies in English and Japanese. Salient resources that she uses in her narrative are parallelism and voicing. The negotiation of communicative competence, as seen in Nina's story, is intrinsically linked to larger discussions about language ideologies, belonging, and identity in the workplace. By foregrounding the lived experiences of L2 speakers, this research opens up new avenues for exploring how multilingual workers in Japan navigate the complexities of language use in their professional lives.

7 Good Japanese: The Making of Competent Speaking Subjects

7.1 Introduction and background

Nihongo ojoozu desu ne! ('Your Japanese is good!'). Most learners of Japanese encounter this phrase as a reaction to uttering bits of Japanese in interaction with another Japanese speaker, particularly so-called native speakers. It appears to be a compliment, on first glance. In this chapter, I argue that this expression takes on meaning that sharply diverges from actual complimenting. I analyze the uptake of this phrase as circulation of metadiscourses that reveal public ideologies of identity and alterity. The data consists of narratives about interactional experiences in which L2 users' Japanese was praised as good. These narratives about sequences in which competence is explicitly addressed constitute a prime site for exploring lived experiences of language. These ordinary experiences are situated in public discourses about L2 Japanese speakers, identity, and belonging.

I start this chapter with two personal accounts and reflections about my own experiences of being complimented to introduce tokens of *nihongo ojoozu desu ne*. I further outline the conceptual implications of lived experiences of Japanese competence. After these accounts, I review relevant studies on evaluation of language competence, compliment sequences and reactions to compliment sequences, before I dive into the empirical analysis of my interlocutors' accounts of being complimented on their Japanese competence.

7.1.1 Personal accounts

The following two vignettes illustrate moments in which I encountered a *nihongo ojoozu desu ne* and reflected upon it (see Sections 4.2.5 and 4.2.6 on methodological explanations). The first vignette deals with an encounter in a café inside a library in northeastern Japan.

Vignette 1

Tagajo city library, September 5, 2022

I'm at the Tagajo city library, a few stations away from Sendai. It is my first time at this library since it was moved and rebuilt. The city is slowly recovering from the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami in March 2011. I'm staying in Sendai for a few days for interviews and meeting some friends.

I'm ordering coffee at the café located on the first floor inside the library. I'm standing in line at the counter. It's my turn to order. *Burakku koohii kudasai. Aisu de*. ('Black coffee, please. Iced.') Ordering is infused with English-derived expressions adjusted to Japanese phonotactic structure.

After ordering my coffee, the store assistant told me *nihongo ojoozu desu ne*. 'Your Japanese is good.'

I smile and quickly think about how to respond. Maybe in a way not to reaffirm the compliment? Or just appreciate it? I end up mumbling something like an awkward *iya:* … ('no, uhm …') And perhaps *sonna koto nai desu ...* ('it's not like that …'). How to respond?

She asks me where I'm from and for how long I'm living in Japan. I'm a bit surprised to encounter these questions in an economic exchange. Usually, I don't expect questions beyond those related to ordering at cafés in Japan.

But I'm not surprised to hear *nihongo ojoozu desu ne*. I've heard this expression many times in Japan, either directed at myself, while overhearing, or in anecdotes my friends told me. I guess not because of my good Japanese—how could my interlocutor judge from such a fleeting exchange? But because I am someone with perceivable non-native Japanese appearance with a hearable foreign accent, maybe?

Tagajo is far away from prime tourist destinations. People may describe it as a peripheral place where locals encounter few tourists from abroad or internationals who live in the city.

After receiving my coffee, I walk to the tables in the lounge, sit down, and start writing my reflections on the past fieldwork days. One section is devoted to the encounter I just had.

The second vignette deals with an exchange I had at a drug store in Tokyo.

Vignette 2

Near Senkawa Station in Tokyo, February 27, 2025

I'm at Matsumoto Kiyoshi to buy OTC cold medicine. I'm looking for a similar type of medicine a bought in the past. It took me some time to find the right one. When purchasing the medicine, the cashier calls for the *yakuzaishi* ('pharmacist'). She carefully explains the use and precautions to me, in order to make sure that there is no *ran'yoo* ('abuse') of medicine. This expression is written on the information sheet that is handed to me. The precautions include four questions that the pharmacist asks the purchaser. In the past, I was confused about the specific questions and didn't understand everything. I was surprised to be asked four questions in the first place.

The pharmacist explains the four items (formulated as questions) on the list that outlines the precautions for purchase and use. I say *wakarimashita* ('got it') after she explained the second or third question to me. But I think my understanding emerged at this second time that I go through this interactional genre.

The pharmacist then praised my Japanese. *Nihongo ojoozu desu ne*. And she asked me how long I've been in Japan. I told her that it's more like 'coming and going' (*ittari kitari*, I'm not even sure if that's the right expression), but I told her that in total it would be more than four years.

This time, I was better prepared for the questions than last year. I could understand this interactional routine. Maybe that impressed her a little as well. People might think that I understood because my responses make it seem that way. But can the person I'm speaking with really know if I understand them?

The vignettes capture two moments of an interactional routine that I sometimes encounter. Upon uttering mere tokens of Japanese, such as an order at a café or a *wakarimashita* at the counter of a store, one receives a compliment. Good Japanese. How can it be assessed based on a fleeting interaction?

I don't mind hearing this phrase and joining this routine. Over time, I came to understand compliments and praise as part of how you communicate in Japan. I don't mean that I regard such compliments as insincere. Rather, I see it as a part of the toolkit in Japanese discourse people draw on to enact their orientation toward maintaining social relationships. In retrospect, this is part of developing an indexical awareness toward speech acts and routines.

I've had conversations about such experiences with many friends who have learnt Japanese. Some told me that after years of studying Japanese, they get annoyed when being praised in this way. I remember a conversation I had with my friend Jun from graduate school (see Extract 1.1). We were both at the end of our MA studies, talking at a café. She told me that she feels competent and valued as L2 user of Japanese in interactions with Japanese people in which she does *not* get complimented on her Japanese, even if it is praise. Jun explained that she, in contrast, feels competent when they do not comment on her Japanese at all. For her, receiving no compliment, or rather, not being subjected to the enregistered discursive routine of complimenting, evokes a feeling of being a legitimate, accepted user of Japanese. This account points to the implications that complimenting on an L2 user's Japanese engender, that is forms of *positioning*. Being ascribed to the position as someone different. This ascription works by mobilizing explicit metapragmatic discourse about Japanese competence. Before I explore such positionings further, I provide a conceptual outline to understand the function and effect of compliment sequences about good Japanese.

7.1.2 Compliments and responses

Before I review the literature on (discourse about) compliments and responses in Japanese more broadly, I insert a note on the morphological structure of the key expression I concentrate on in this chapter.

Example 7.1. Your Japanese is good[69]

日本語	お上手	です	ね
nihongo	o-joozu	des-u	ne
Japanese	HON-good	be:POL-PRS	IP

'(Your) Japanese is good.'

The expression consists of a noun (*nihongo*, 'Japanese'), 'good' with an honorification prefix *o-* attached to the nominal adjective *joozu* ('good'). The prefix can be omitted. The expression incorporates polite style, indicated with the particle verb *desu* in present tense. The interactional particle *ne* invites speakers' direction to resolving issues about interactional

[69] The terminology used for glossing and morphological categorization is partly adapted from Rickmeyer (1995).

alignment in the participation framework (Morita 2012a). The particle *wa* which would conventionally be attached to the topic (the noun *nihongo*, 'Japanese') is often omitted.

Nihongo ojoozu desu ne is so prevalent in everyday discourse between L1 and L2 users of Japanese that it has become a broadly enregistered experience and, subsequently, a metadiscourse. Learners and other participants in the Japanese *metalinguistic community* (Avineri & Harasta 2021) now participate in recreating instances of this discourse. It is a loose community connected not only through Japanese as a language, but through shared ideologies about Japanese and language learning.

The enregistered compliment as well as discourse about this compliment represent a *speech chain* (Agha 2007a), a linking of events of repeated entextualization. Links to this chain are added continuously in everyday discourse. This discursive sequence is reiterated or cited in interaction by people who come to inhabit, albeit at times ascribed, certain participant roles (Silverstein & Urban 1996). These roles include, on an interactional level, the person uttering a compliment as well as the person receiving the compliment. These roles are connected to more complex webs of events that inform individuals' identification practices. As the domain of compliments of competences broadened, the discursive sequence became enregistered, which means that it is now socially recognizable over larger populations, among many users of Japanese, particularly L2 users. For example, Japanese language learning influencers create content based on this phrase and how it is received.[70]

The discourse about good Japanese therefore also includes learners' statements about how to react in such events. The responses in the media are often humorous, making fun of situations in which an L2 user's Japanese competence is praised (see, for example, SturtzSreetharan 2015; Suzuki 2015). The fun is that learners receive this phrase when uttering merely a single word, such as 'hello' (*konnichi wa*) in Japanese, as can also be seen in the vignettes and also later in my analysis of Extract 7.2 (see also Takeuchi 2023b: 135). And such rash compliments seem to occur quite frequently. Learners who are praised for using a

[70] I do not analyze digital discourse in this thesis, but I want to give an example of how such discourse circulates in the media. Consider the following example from Tyson, a Japanese language teacher on Instagram:
https://www.instagram.com/reel/Crnas1OgTR_/?igsh=MTNkNDZuNmNmejZpYg%3D%3D
He addresses learners of Japanese in this reel and gives examples how they can react to receiving a compliment on their good Japanese. His suggestions mainly include humble reactions, avoiding self-praise. The last suggestion in this reel is a funny reaction that includes what he calls an anime phrase. It belongs to a register within role language used in animes (Kinsui 2003).

single Japanese word may perceive this response as insincere. Someone who knows only a few words in Japanese would unlikely evaluate themselves as a speaker of good Japanese.

The phrase 'your Japanese is good' is an example of explicit metapragmatic discourse about competence. It constitutes a nesting or embedding of metapragmatic discourses (see, for example, Vigouroux 2009; Wortham & Locher 1999 on such embeddings). An L2 speaker's discourse about the experiences of being complimented—receiving a *nihongo ojoozu desu ne* in interaction with a Japanese person—is a *rationalizing metadiscourse* (Silverstein 2021: 38). It is a metadiscourse to make sense of explicit metapragmatic discourse.

I take a step back to look at the structural and interactional embedding of this compliment. On the locutionary, denotationally explicit level, *nihongo ojoozu desu ne* is a speech act of complimenting. Regardless of a speaker's intention behind uttering this compliment to a (perceived) L2 user of Japanese, the interlocutors have to respond to it in some way. Between receiving a compliment and forming a compliment response, the receiver evaluates the compliment. This process involves an adjacency pair, with the first part assessment, i.e., the compliment, and the second part calls for either a preferred or dispreferred response (Levinson 1983: 336). The sequence involves the following components, illustrated in a simplified way.[71]

Table 4. Interactional compliment sequence

	a (perceived) L2 user of Japanese	**a (perhaps "native") speaker of Japanese**
1	uttering bits of Japanese	
2		perceiving, evaluating Japanese
3		uttering compliment
4	perception of compliment	
5	uttering response to compliment	

[71] Satoh (2014) has shown that Japanese compliment discourse in interaction is far more complex and goes beyond simple compliment-response pairs. It is collaboratively constructed by all participants in talk.

A reaction or response, however, can unfold over longer intervals and spatiotemporal scales. For example, through retrospection, through a distant view back on the compliment event and interactional moments in which such a sequence occurred. In the analysis in Section 7.2, I analyze L2 user's reflections on being complimented on their Japanese as emotional reaction and one kind of experience they make when interacting in Japan.

As for varieties of responses, learners of Japanese have been reported to use tactics of self-deprecation, reticence, and self-effacement to take a stance as modest or unboastful learner of Japanese, or to appear humble (see Burch 2017 for an example). Pragmatic studies found that learners of Japanese (as a second as well as a foreign language) tend to use more negative and avoidance strategies as compliment response (Shimizu 2009). This could be an outcome of ideologies that permeate Japanese language education (Heinrich 2005). Learners of Japanese are expected to communicatively portray a modest persona, as modesty is an ideologically valorized aspect of social conduct. Compliment responses are influenced by two conflicting systems. *Supportive action*, i.e., responses that affirm and legitimize the compliment, and *self-praise avoidance*, that is avoidance of actions that could be perceived as praising oneself (Pomerantz 2021). Ideologies of communication and interaction influence these two systems and preference organization for responses. In the cases that I presented in the vignettes, the latter system prevailed. I tried to avoid praising myself. Modifying and hedging instances of self-praise has also been reported for speakers of Japanese (Itakura 2022).[72] This practice also surfaces in the accounts which I analyze below. Compliment sequences have implications for positioning speakers as they make them into speaking subjects.

7.1.3 Subjectivation

Moving on to the social implications of complimenting L2 Japanese with an enregistered expression, we see that, as hinted at in the introduction, commenting on competence is a form of positioning. Through this positioning, speakers are made into subjects, into types of persons (Agha 2007a). When we shift the perspective from a mere linguistic toward an interactional one, we have to take into account the influence of outer appearance and

[72] Classic pragmatic literature treats such tendency as a reflection of a *modesty maxim* of politeness (Leech 1983: 132) and thus as a principle of interactive behavior.

perception of appearance. Even before forming an utterance, regardless of the language, individuals may be positioned as non-Japanese and, in accordance, as an L2 user of Japanese based on how their race or ethnicity may be perceived by their interlocutors. This initial perception refracts the subsequent interaction. While I pursue an overall discursive approach to identification practices in this thesis, I regard the construction of "non-Japaneseness" first as *perception*, and subsequently as discourse. In face-to-face encounters, one first needs to be visually perceived as a person such-and-such type, before discourse can unfold. With this, however, I do not phenomenologically ascribe more truth to immediate perceptions, in contrast to discursive constructions of appearance, accent, and so on.

Through subjectivation, individuals are ascribed to occupy to a certain subject position via the use of Japanese, even if it is just a single "hello" or an order at a café. The mere act of uttering L2 Japanese in conjunction with other perceptible and communicative signs that emerge from the L2 user's hexis and habitus, is an act of self-disclosure and entry to the contingency of subjectivation. Telling someone "your Japanese is good" therefore is an *interpellation* that indexes alterity (Althusser 2014 [1971]), an act of making a subject into a *different* person, in this case, an L2 users of Japanese, in contrast to a "native speaker." The enregistered discursive routine of complimenting Japanese competence is a performance that establishes a relation and subject position. This subject position is taken up by L2 users in response, in immediate interaction, or in mediate retrospection.

In what follows, I show that discourse about competence compliments emerges in narratives through multiple, contrastive alignments that are elements of *stances of alterity* (Ball 2004, 2015; Hastings & Manning 2004). These stances are "structurally identifiable acts of position taking that presume and delineate relations of difference" (Ball 2015: 361). While alterity stances engender feelings of being different in L2 users, they do not exclude them from being part of society or forming meaningful relationships with Japanese individuals.

Being subjected to a compliment on one's Japanese is yet another arena of lived experience of competence. In the following analysis, my interview partners construe their interlocutors' stances as stances of alterity—"the other, my interlocutor, signals that I am different"—and thereby take a stance of alterity themselves. They also present the ascribed status as a foreigner as normalized. They acknowledge the condition of being (perceived as) different as experience of their being in Japan.

Narratives of such experiences are events in which public metapragmatic discourses influence private interactions. Even though in the last years, interactional routines are

shifting (for some studies pointing to these changes, see the chapters in Heinrich et al. 2025, and Heinrich 2025a in particular), the discourse of *good Japanese* may still be cited or may emerge in everyday encounters that L2 users of Japanese make. The discourse is situated in the public domain, as categorization of people and their language competences are inherently connected to political debates about migration and language policy (Länsisalmi 2025).

In the extracts that follow, my interlocutors present *tokens* of being complimented, speech events in which they were praised for their Japanese. These tokens are connected via *type*-interdiscursivity (Silverstein 2005) with the enregistered discursive sequence of being complimented with "your Japanese is good." All accounts are embedded in the generic metapragmatic frame of the interview. Before I explore segments of this discourse from my data, I recap some previous studies that addressed the issue of evaluations of L2 Japanese and its implications for speaker legitimacy.

7.1.4 Evaluating L2 Japanese and responses

To understand the (meta)discourse on complimenting L2-Japanese and its users, I look at some studies that examine learners and their experiences of interactions in which their Japanese was evaluated in some way (for a more extensive review, see Sections 2.6 and 2.7 in my literature review chapter). In an older study of reactions to L2 Japanese, Miller (1977) proposed a *law of inverse returns*. He suggested that the better the Japanese of an L2 speaker is, the more negative are the reactions of L1 users of Japanese. This view on responses to L2 Japanese has been criticized by Ohta (1993: 225) who found in her study that "none [of her participants] experienced diminishing returns as their proficiency in Japanese increased." She explored the experiences of individuals who did see returns and legitimation as L2 users of Japanese through investment in their language learning, even though they did occasionally have negative experiences in interactions with L1 Japanese users.

Burgess (2011) contextualizes disapproving stances toward L2 Japanese against the backdrop of language and immigration policies in Japan that are ambivalent and sluggish to see Japanese competence as a resource for migrants to integrate into the society. He presents an example of a politician's remarks in which he favors "broken Japanese" of L2 users to relegate them as distinct from native speakers of Japanese. Carlson (2018) reports in her ethnography how Japanese people were surprised when they realized that she and her research participants could speak Japanese. She claims that an automatic compliment, such

as *nihongo ojoozu*, is a scripted move that reasserts difference. Deprivation of speaker legitimacy through assessment of their Japanese is an experience L2 users of Japanese report also in Takeuchi's (2020a, 2023b) ethnographic investigation. Processes of illegitimation operate via the effects of subjectivation practices that originate in attention to and thematization of L2 Japanese. The mere focus on form and subsequent comments, positive or negative, position speakers of Japanese as L2 speakers, reinforcing their outsider status (Takeuchi 2023b: 154). Ostheider (2005) has shown that in extreme cases, such evaluations may lead to forms of accommodation that devalue an L2 speaker. He investigated several contexts in which a person appearing as a foreigner was accompanied by a person appearing Japanese. The foreigner asked questions in Japanese to an unknown Japanese person on the street, for example in situations such as asking for directions. Ostheider found that the person asked addressed the Japanese-looking individual in their response, rather than the foreigner who actually asked the question. He interpreted this as a *3rd person response*, a communicative reaction based on the assumption that a foreign-looking individual could not understand their answer given in Japanese.

These studies show that L2 users experience being treated differently, for example, as a 'foreigner' (*gaijin*) who is perceived to exhibit linguistic practices that diverge from native speaker norms (Neustupný 2005). Iino (1996) coined the term *gaijinization* (being made into a *gaijin*) for this this process, which is a subjectivation practice salient in—but not exclusive to—Japanese society and zones of international encounters within this society.[73] L1 and L2 users of Japanese create categorizations and belonging to the respective category, which has been analyzed as surfacing in conversation, as an interactional accomplishment (Fukuda 2014). Differential (and highly essentialized) categories as Japanese and non-Japanese are thus activated and reinforced in discursive interaction.

The following example from Hof (2022) illustrates EU-migrant's experiences of being complimented on their Japanese and its implications for feeling of connection and belonging to the Japanese society.

> This also explains why my interlocutors' reactions towards Japanese people, who obviously regarded them as tourists, changed over time. One of the standard phrases addressing foreigners in Japan – especially if easily identifiable foreigners such as White people – is the iconic *nihongo jōzu desu ne* (your Japanese is good). The Europeans almost exclusively mentioned how often

[73] The expression *gaijin*, a contracted form of *gaikokujin* ('foreigner'), is perceived as a derogatory expression now absent from media but it still surfaces in everyday discourse (Gottlieb 2006: 96–98).

> Japanese people curiously commented on their Japanese language skills, although they had barely said a word in Japanese. When the migrants were still new to Japan and their language level basic, they seemed to be proud of the compliment. After some time, however, it became a symbol for their ambivalence towards and sometimes frustration regarding living in Japan. Many reported how they heard the same words even after years in Japan when they had become fairly fluent in the language. Such situations remind the EU Generation of Japanese people's reluctance to accept them as members of society rather than merely as guests and thus of their infeasibility to become a more integral part of Japanese society. (Hof 2022: 161)

All these studies point to L2 users' rather critical evaluations of compliments. L2 users of Japanese are often complimented on their Japanese in first-time encounters that are characterized by their fleeting and bounded nature. Therefore, there is a lack of empirical evidence of such interactional sequences and routines, and more observational and anecdotal evidence, as can be seen, for example in Coulmas' (1987: 97) recollections. He reports how a "Caucasian foreigner" (sic) uses Japanese at a bank. The clerk suddenly switched to English, even though the conversation was progressing in Japanese.[74] When the L2 users confronts the clerk and asks why they are using English, the clerk compliments the L2 user's Japanese. While recollections of such kind certainly feed into the empirical parts of this thesis, I hold that they should be analyzed within a more complex analytic apparatus (see Methods Section 4.3). In this chapter, I do not present examples of recorded interactions in which compliments occur. Instead, I analyze what and how individuals tell me about their experiences of being commented on their Japanese. By attending to linguistic analysis of narrative as a mode of experiencing such moments in which Japanese is complimented, I argue that we can explore the (meta-)discourse of "good Japanese" from a subjective and speaker-centered perspective.

7.2 Metadiscourses about Japanese competence

The following examples show extracts from narratives in which users of Japanese tell me about experiences they had in which their Japanese was evaluated as 'good' (*joozu*). They explain how being complimented on their Japanese is particularly prevalent in first-time encounters. Even though formulated as a compliment, my interlocutors do not view these compliment sequences as truthful praise of their Japanese competence. Some of my

[74] Such instances of unwanted code-switching from Japanese into English in a Japanese setting has been investigated as *linguistic microaggression* (Takeuchi 2023a, 2025).

participants report that their interlocutors confront them with stereotypical discourses and questions that evoke a feeling of being different in them and highlight their status as so-called foreigner in Japan. Interactionally, their narratives establish relations of difference between their narrated selves and narrated Japanese interlocutors when talking about their experiences. Distancing themselves from narrated characters, however, leads to alignment with building of rapport through shared experience with the interviewer. This alignment indexes narrated compliment sequences as ordinary experiences for international L2 speaker of Japanese.

In the linguistic analysis of positioning, I focus on mainly four resources that reveal patterns in rationalizing metadiscourse about compliments: parallelism, citation of presumably Japanese voices, calibration of investment or commitment to a stance, and *quotidian framing* (Matsumoto 2015b), a discursive tactic that contextualizes interactional experiences as normal and ordinary. The aim is to illustrate how public comments about L2 Japanese competence shape their lived experiences and perceptions of belonging.

7.2.1 Listing stereotypes

The following example is an extract from an interview with Carlo, an Italian who is living in Sendai, Northeast Japan. He graduated with an MA degree in Japanese studies from a university in Italy and continued his studies in Sendai but has switched to working full-time for a Japanese company at the time of our first interview in September 2022. I met him in 2014 in a class that we took together. Since his time there, he has been building a family with his Japanese wife. He later changed jobs to working in the field of administering international exchange for a university in Sendai, a work that he finds intellectually much more stimulating.

In this interview, one area of questions is related to my interlocutor's sense of belonging. In the example below, I ask him whether he feels part of Japanese society. He reflects on his position as a migrant in Japan. He then tells me about typical interactions in first-time encounters with Japanese individuals.

Extract 7.1: You speak well japanese

01	Carlo:	a:nd eh::: but i know if i new- if i go in a new place in japan (.)
02		there will always happen(ing) the same stuff like
03		↑ ah: you got four season,
04		↑ ah: you speak well japanese,

05		↑ ah: y- you can eat with the: chopsticks (y- y-)
06	Florian:	ya.
07	Carlo:	a::nd,
08	Florian:	mhm.=
09	Carlo:	=all the >i mean< that's normal the first time i probably: i mean
10		i will always (.) be seen as the foreigner like
11	Florian:	mhm.
12	Carlo:	(sure) !i'm part of the f- community,! (.) of japanese community,
13	Florian:	mhm.
14	Carlo:	as a foreigner living in japan.
15	Florian:	[okay. °mhm.°
16	Carlo:	[that's: probably the best way to put it.
17	Florian:	i see. ya.

Carlo describes a typical reaction that his Japanese interlocutors exhibit toward him in first-time encounters. He sets the scene by describing going "to a new place in Japan" (line 1). He claims that there is a pattern in reactions toward him; it is "always […] the same stuff" (line 2). In the following three lines, he voices his Japanese interlocutors via the citational practice of reporting a dialogue that he constructs (Tannen 2007 [1989]). He prefaces this citation with "like" (line 2) and raises the pitch of his voice in the following three turns. He enumerates three stereotypical reactions that a Japanese person exhibits toward him (lines 3–5). The three reactions are introduced with "ah:," a change-of-state token or surprise (Heritage 1984a), followed by "you." These are the voices of evoked speakers or narrated characters that address Carlo when they meet him for the first time. Syntactic parallelism yields sequential enumeration, as illustrated in the following example.

Example 7.2. Parallelism in Carlo's narrative

	A	B	C	D	E
1	↑	ah:	you	got	four season,
2	↑	ah:	you	speak	well japanese,
3	↑	ah:	y- you	can eat	with the: chopsticks

The imagined, voiced, and evoked speakers are surprised that Carlo has four seasons in his country (line 3), that he speaks Japanese well (line 4), and that he can use chopsticks (line 5).

Carlo lists three stereotypical reactions that non-Japanese individuals may receive in first-time encounters with Japanese people. These stereotypes are widely enregistered among migrants who have experience living in Japan. Carlo espouses the idea that Japanese people would assume that other countries do not have four seasons and that they would be special to Japan. In my experience, migrants from European countries sometimes make fun of this idea. The stereotype that Carlo evokes here might be grounded in ideologies of Japanese uniqueness, such as *nihonjinron*, 'discourses about the Japanese' (Yoshino 1992; see also my brief summary in 2.2). For an analysis of aesthetic appreciation of the four seasons in Japan, see Shirane (2012). Appreciation of four seasons, or its mere existence in contrast to other countries, leverages Japanese uniqueness in this type of nationalist discourse. Being able to use chopsticks as a non-East Asian individual is sometimes described as surprising from the Japanese side (Moody 2019a: 152–154).

I will not dive deeper into possible reasons why such stereotypes circulate in contact situations. The focus here lies on ascriptions of good Japanese (line 4) and how Carlos presents such instances as an experience of alterity that is anchored in discourse about competence and that affect his feelings of belonging. Carlo lists the compliment of his Japanese as one of these stereotypical interactions. While the first and third items in this list are more likely to be readily interpreted as explicit articulations of metapragmatic stereotypes (Agha 2004), positive evaluations of Japanese can be interpreted as a possibly stereotypical reaction in the context of this enumeration. More contextual and metapragmatic knowledge is needed to recognize evaluations of good Japanese as part of communicative routines. The interpretation that being complimented on one's Japanese competence is a stereotype and not a substantiated assessment of competence, becomes plausible within the co-text, i.e., the list of other stereotypes, and the context (being a white foreigner and L2 user of Japanese in Japan), and by drawing on enregistered discourses. Compliments on Japanese thus appear as a patronizing stance toward L2 users of Japanese.

The interview was conducted in a café with background noise. When re-listening to the audio, I recollect that I started laughing after Carlo mentions the four seasons. This is not detectable in the audio. However, as I remember, I could resonate with the stereotypes that Carlo lists as I had encountered them before. Other friends have told me that they encountered these stereotypes, too.

For Carlo, these interactions are "normal" in first-time encounters (line 9). Besides the denotational expression "normal," he adds ">i mean<" in fast pace that adds another layer to

normalization and intensifies the *investment* in his stance (Kiesling 2020). The stance he is invested in consists of a presentation of ordinariness, claiming that such interactions are ordinary experience a foreigner would make in Japan. He delineates and further specifies the contexts in which such interactions are normal, namely in first-time encounters in Japanese discourse (line 9). He repeats "i mean." It could be a way to make this statement appear more self-evident. It could also work as a filler. However, Maynard (2013) has shown that "I mean" appears in prefaced position to a complaint, with the aim of creating alignment with the listener. Such an interpretation is plausible in this case. Having experienced moments of alienation from Japanese speakers, Carlo might want to express a complaint about being othered. Yet he frames this complaint implicitly. This invites alignment from me, as someone who listens to Carlo's story and who can relate to his experiences. At the same time, "probably" diminishes epistemic certainty with respect to discourses that he would experience in first-time encounters (line 9). It functions as a hedge to mitigate his potential complaint. This might be the reason why I do not explicitly create affiliation with Carlo, merely uttering a "mhm" (line 11).[75]

Carlo accepts that he "will always (.) be seen as the foreigner" (line 10). For him, experiences of being different, being a foreigner are normalized and so mundane that he accepts and thus engages in stereotypical interactional routines (see also Moody 2014). He ends this short explanation, going back to my original question about his feelings of belonging to Japanese society. He does feel being a part of the Japanese community (line 12). I register this with a continuer (line 13). He adds that he feels part of the community "as a foreigner living in japan" (line 14). He positions himself as someone being part of the Japanese society, while at the same time inhabiting or maintaining an identity as somebody different from the mainstream Japanese society. Being positioned as the foreigner, as he describes it, happens particularly in first-time encounters, where he is subjected to various kinds of stereotypes. By using the indexical "foreigner" as a self-categorization, he emphasizes such experience as non-Japanese individual in Japan that almost inevitably has to deal with such stereotypical reactions.

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[75] I might unconsciously be reinforcing the generic frame of the interview here—i.e., waiting for a response (second part of a question-answer pair) to my question about Carlo's belonging. Thus, I might abstain from overtly creating affiliative alignment with him when he describes feelings of potential exclusion as ordinary experiences. It mirrors my approach to interviewing, as I tried to keep my responses in narrative sequences to a minimum (see Koven 2014 on communicative ideologies in interviews).

The indexical expressions that entextualize Carlo's emerging stance toward compliments about his Japanese competence include *generics*, i.e., "the same stuff" and "always," as well as the expression "normal," along with repetition of syntactic and prosodic structure. These indexicals establish a *quotidian frame* (Matsumoto 2015b) that renders the discourse in this reported, narrated event as ordinary interactions. This framing indexes his experiences of alterity in first-time encounters in Japan, presenting them as ordinary to ground the self in a emotionally conflicting situation—being treated as a foreigner, as someone different, and being bombarded with stereotypes.

In the interview context, his narrative also forms alignment with me. In the way how he voices his interlocutors in first-time encounters and the way how I respond with shared amusement, our positions as L2 users of Japanese are re-created intersubjectively. This re-creation works because we can act on the assumption that we have made the same experiences in interactions before (Heritage 1984b: 54). This is true, given my first-hand experience outlined in the vignettes. Perhaps Carlo feels comfortable sharing this experience with me, because he knows that I have been in similar situations before. He presents these moments as accreted stances or a *positioning practice* that Japanese individuals display toward him. His presentation of such stances via voicing relies on his assumptions about my epistemic status. It is an imagination of shared knowledge and experiences of interactions with Japanese individuals. By selecting these stereotypes and presenting them to me, he also forms a metapragmatic stance in which he links this discourse to a Japanese persona that exhibits a somewhat naïve behavior toward migrants.

7.2.2 Metapragmatic absence

Discourses of good Japanese competence come up in various interviews that I conducted for my project. In the following extract, I ask Chiara from Italy about reactions to her Japanese. She is a researcher specializing in linguistics with a focus on Japanese. She is not permanently living in Japan at the time of our interview in 2023, but intermittently visits Japan for study and research purposes since many years.

I introduce my question as "feedback" which implies a structured, even institutionalized way of commenting on someone's performance. The reason why I used this expression was to find a term that is general and broad enough, meaning that it can include both positive and negative evaluations and assessments, without using the more technical term "evaluation."

Extract 7.2: Joozu

01	Florian:	have you ever received any feedback,
02	Chiara:	[.hh °°hm::°°
03	Florian:	[maybe except from your teacher on: [on- (that)
04	Chiara:	[!ye:s! but you know how japanese people are.
05	Florian:	[°okay.°
06	Chiara:	[like you just say konnichi wa.=ee: joo:zu::. [((laughs))
07	Florian:	[$ok^{hh}ay.$
08	Chiara:	.hh [no but ehm:::,
09	Florian:	[°kay.°
10	Chiara:	no. my friends they are always very nice they're al[ways like no:,
11	Florian:	[mhm.
12	Chiara:	~m:.~ ((2,1)) we don't see any different.
13	Florian:	[°okay.°
14	Chiara:	[or we don't ~ehm~ ((1,7)) yes. eh::m:. ((2,9))
15		mh. (.) ↑maybe:↓ that friend that came and visited me in italy he told me:,
16	Florian:	mhm.
17	Chiara:	that my:, j- my accent was getting very italian,
18		something like that [>i don't re]member.<
19	Florian:	[okay.] mhm. ((2,5))
20	Chiara:	mh. (.) but yeah but usually they tell me
21		oh you're very good in japane:se=totemo joozu desu ne:.=
22		=this kind of things.
23	Florian:	okay.=
24	Chiara:	=>eh my fri- no but like other people<
25		my friends just don't (.) hm: tell me anything.
26	Florian:	okay mhm. (.) ya. i see.

I ask Chiara whether she has ever received feedback on her Japanese (line 1). Before I clarify my questions, she takes some time to think and starts to produce an answer with a perceptible inbreath and a "hm::" in a very soft voice that marks the process of thinking about an answer (line 2). In the following turn, I add detail to my question by excluding feedback from a teacher (line 3), because I was interested in hearing about evaluations of her Japanese outside classroom contexts. Chiara affirms pronouncedly ("!ye:s!") but immediately qualifies her answer and thus the quality of feedback (line 4). She tells me "but you know how japanese people are" (line 4) before she produces a stereotypical reaction to her Japanese. She uses a

generalizing expression here: "Japanese people." On the interactional level, she activates my epistemic status of these "Japanese people." This utterance is a source for creating alignment, perhaps as a cushion to prepare a characterization of Japanese people in her next turn.

I produce a quiet "okay" (line 5). Chiara then produces an example of "how Japanese people are" when giving feedback on her Japanese. She frames this with "you just say" and uses the Japanese expression *konnichi wa* ('hello'), citing herself or some general non-Japanese person. Immediately latching to the greeting, she produces a response: "ee: joo:zu:::." ('wow, good') This is a direct evaluation or compliment of the performed speech act of greeting in an embedded narrated event, produced by a narrated non-Japanese individual (line 6). There is no pause in the transition from the 'hello' to the answer, these segments are latched. This transition without sharp prosodic modulation stands as an icon for a swift reaction to a simple greeting uttered by someone who is presumably not a Japanese person. The lengthening and stress layered over *joozu* prosodically embodies her interlocutors' surprise that Chiara perceives when people praise her Japanese.

She comes up with a kind of feedback here that is grounded in Japanese-as-L2-users' experiences of communicating in Japan with Japanese people. Upon uttering a greeting, one is immediately complimented for one's good Japanese competence. Her preface "you know" serves as a resource to create intersubjectivity in interaction with me—intersubjectivity that is grounded in the common experience of two L2 users of Japanese, as I showed the in the previous example from my exchange with Carlo. However, this explicit formulation underlines the fact that she can assume my epistemic status with regard to this kind of discourse, as she knows about my background. In this example, again, we see formation of alignment with narrating a presumably shared experience as non-Japanese individual in Japan.

Chiara starts laughing immediately after citing the voices of her Japanese interlocutors (line 6) and I share her amusement about this phrase, being aware that it is a common experience for individuals in Japan. I register her utterance, producing "ok^{hh}ay" in a smiley voice with distinct aspiration (line 7).

In the following line, Chiara further qualifies her amusing statement about linguistic interactions with Japanese people. Her "no" (lines 8 & 10) might appear as the negation of a previous statement, but rather functions as a hedge to her claims about Japanese people's linguistic behavior here. After a perceptible outbreath, she moves the focus to the group of people and distinguishes their reactions. She explains to me that her friends "are always very

nice" (line 10). This could imply that she perceives other reactions from people who are not friends, not as nice. However, this interpretation needs to be confirmed. While I produce a continuer (line 11), Chiara starts to voice her (Japanese) friends, who do not see a difference (line 12). This difference is a difference between their Japanese and her Japanese. Chiara uses the quotative "like" (line 10) to introduce her double-voicing. She projects their view here, through their eyes. Her friends do not see any difference (line 12). She shifts the deictic anchor in the narrated event to "we," which creates another voice, i.e., the voice of her friends. This shift, however, comes after some time that Chiara takes to think about an answer, including a filler in creaky voice and a pause (line 12). By looking at this segment, it is not possible to tell if she needs time to think about content, interactional appropriateness, language, or ways to formulate her thoughts.

I register this utterance with a quiet "okay" (line 13), which overlaps with Chiara's reformulation. Looking at this segment "or we don't ~ehm~ ((1,7))" (line 14), another possible interpretation of "we" could be an inclusive "we"—that she also does not see a difference in communication with her presumably Japanese friends. She continues to search for the next expression and inserts another pause "yes. eh::m: ((2,9))" (line 14). What follows is a description of an event in which her Japanese was commented upon by a Japanese friend who visited her in Italy. In this scene, she evokes a contrast to the prior event in which she received any kind of comment on her Japanese, in contrast to no difference. She introduces the next event with distinct intonational contour on "maybe." This intonation might emphasize epistemic uncertainty. This sets the scene of a short interactional encounter she recalls with her friend (line 15). She recounts what her friend told her, this time with a form of indirect citation ("told me:, | that" in lines 15 & 17), which is broken up by my continuer in line 16. Chiara's elongated "me:" and continuing intonation create a space into which I insert the continuer. Chiara recounts that the friend told her that her accent in Japanese was getting more Italian (line 17). This indirect form of citation could be a way of distancing herself from the utterance in contrast to direct reporting. With regard to indirect reporting, Lucy (1993b: 19) notes that "indirect quotation can eliminate aspects of the original that the reporter does not want stressed." She foregrounds the uncertainty of this kind of feedback or comment, denotationally with "something like that [>i don't re]member.<" and prosodically with faster pace on "i don't remember" (line 18). I infuse her turn with my continuers (line 19).

Chiara recounts a potentially face-threatening interactional experience here. However, it seems that I expect her to continue telling me about the event with a friend in Italy,

indicated with a comparably long pause ((2,5)), given the many overlaps in our conversation in this short extract. After Chiara ends her pause, she goes back to rather positive evaluations of her Japanese. She frames the beginning of her citation with "but yeah but usually they tell me" (line 20). Then, she voices what "they" tell her. Through direct quotations, she tells me that they compliment her Japanese ("oh you're very good in japane:se" in line 21). This expression is followed by the Japanese translation *totemo joozu desu ne:* ('you're very good' in line 21). Between the English and Japanese segments in this turn is no intonational break, which makes "very good" and *totemo joozu* appear clustered together. The switch into Japanese approximates the recount of the citation, because such compliments were uttered in Japanese to her. By switching into Japanese, the performative quality of the citation in the narrating event draws closer to the narrated source stance that was taken toward her. Chiara indexes this as a "general" or common statement when she latches the turn "this kind of things" (line 22). She presents *tokens* (i.e., direct citations) of the *type*-interdiscursive phenomenon of a Japanese-as-L2 user being complimented for their Japanese (Silverstein 2005).[76]

I register her utterance again with "okay" (line 23). Chiara clarifies who compliments her Japanese. She starts with talking about her friends and then produces a self-repair with negation "no." She indicates "like other people" (line 24), all uttered in a fast pace. The other people are listening subjects (Inoue 2003), a group of imagined individuals that hold entitlement to make evaluations of her Japanese in the form of complimenting—that Chiara presumably perceives as not quite sincere. In contrast, she says that her friends do not make such comments. Instead, they "don't (.) hm: tell me anything" (line 25). She has characterized her Japanese friends in this extract already as "nice," as people who do not make explicit evaluations of her Japanese. What Chiara refers to is what I here call *metapragmatic absence*—no explicit talk about her competence in Japanese, whether the assessment may be good or bad. It is precisely such absence of evaluations of her competence that makes her feel a sense of gaining legitimacy as a speaker of Japanese (Takeuchi 2020a, 2023b). And this is similar to what I have heard from other interlocutors (recall my recollection of a conversation with Jun from my personal accounts in Section 7.1.1).

[76] Based on Silverstein (2005), we understand such *tokens* as a concrete discursive event and as an instantiation or manifestation of a more encompassing general or patterned process, i.e., a *type*. As I argue that compliments on L2 Japanese are an enregistered routine, a token is a discrete element or event that can only be parsed by embedding it into broader contextuality. This means that the examples that my interlocutors give by citing this phrase has to be interpreted by referring to the metadiscourse as a type.

For Chiara, other people stand in contrast to friends. When interactions with friends may be placed in private spaces, interactions with "other people" might happen in public or professional settings. The relations and encounters that constitute a domain in public thus seem to allow for compliments on Japanese competence. In the way of Chiara contextualizes her experiences of feedback on her Japanese, we can detect a distinction between people she associates with in various contexts—and who position themselves variously when engaging with her identity as an L2 user of Japanese. In her construal of her competence in Japanese, other voices are present, even if they do not speak.

7.2.3 Positive reactions

Responses to L2 user's Japanese are varied. In the following example, Nina from Chapter 6 reports on her experiences of interacting in Japanese. At this point in our interview from February 2023, we are talking about the time before she permanently moved to Japan. After graduating from high school, she traveled to Japan once per year while working on her undergraduate degree in Japanese studies. I ask her if she had chances to use Japanese when she was traveling (line 1 in transcript below).

Extract 7.3: Positive reaktionen

01	FL:	und hast du da auch ein bisschen japanisch verwenden können?	*and were you also able to use a bit of Japanese there?*
02		[( )	*[( )*
03	NI:	[ja doch man hat schon es war halt schon n positives ereignis=	*[yeah well you could already I mean it really was a positive event=*
04		=dass du es quasi halt dann wirklich <anwenden konntes,>	*=that you could like actually <apply it,>*
05	FL:	[mhm	*[mhm*
06	NI:	[klar (na) gut am anfang du konntest halt nich viel n[e.	*[sure (well) I mean in the beginning you just couldn't do much, ri[ght.*
07	FL:	[mh.	*[mh.*
08	NI:	aber japaner sind ja schon wenn °> du deinen namen $quasi auf japanisch [sagen (muss)$ <	*but Japanese people are really like when °> you (have to) [just say your name $in Japanese you know$ <*
09	FL:	[$mhmh.$	*[$mhmh.$*
10	NI:	$ % ja. >nihongo ojoozu des~~u~~ ne.< % $	*$ % yeah. >nihongo ojoozu des~~u~~ ne.< % $*
11	FL:	[$ja.$	*[$yeah.$*
12	NI:	[also ehm, (.) du wirst halt m- (.)	*[so ehm, (.) you're not exac– (.)*

13		>nich gerade mit offenen armen< (.) empfangen aber, (.)	*>not quite welcomed with open arms< (.) but, (.)*
14	FL:	°mhm.°=	*°mhm.°=*
15	NI:	=japaner wissen das schon zu- zu wertschätzen dass wenn man's ~lernt,~	*=Japanese people do ap- appreciate it that when you ~learn~ it,*
16		ja ich mein das war da[mals auch schon vor zehn jahren,	*yeah i mean that was ten years ago b[ack then*
17	FL:	[ja.	*[yeah.*
18	NI:	ehm,	*uhm,*
19	FL:	°hm.°	*°hm.°*
20	NI:	da waren vielleicht noch weniger ausländer als jetzt hier.	*there were maybe even fewer foreigners than there're here now.*
21	FL:	mhm.	*mhm.*
22	NI:	ehm (.) die leuten waren halt scho:n sehr, ne.	*ehm (.) people were really li:ke, y'know.*
23		>wie soll man sagen.<	*>how to say.<*
24		nich gerade begei:stert aber (.) verwundert?	*not exactly enthusia:stic but (.) surprised?*
25	FL:	mhm.	*mhm.*
26	NI:	→wenn man's halt anwenden konnte,=	*→when you could actually use it,=*
27		=oder halt zumindest was sagen konnte,=	*=or at least say something,=*
28		=ob- wie großartig richtig es in dem fall war is dann was anderes	*=whe- whether it was actually right in that case is another matter*
29		[aber eh, .hh	*[but uh, .hh*
30	FL:	[hm.	*[hm.*
31	NI:	ja. (.) man hat schon eher positive reaktionen gehabt [als als ne:gative oder so,	*yeah. (.) you really got more positive reactions [than ne:gative ones or so,*
32	FL:	[mhm.	*[mhm.*

Nina describes using Japanese when traveling to Japan as a positive event (lines 3–4). She explains that she could not use so much Japanese, as she was studying the basics in her course as a beginner (line 6). She then starts to animate how Japanese people reacted when she introduced herself in Japanese (line 8). 'When telling them your name in Japanese' (*wenn* $_{acc}$*> du deinen namen $quasi auf japanisch [sagen (muss)$ <* in line 8) is in accelerando pace. This acceleration of pace stands as an indexical icon for a quick response from the Japanese people to her language use. Nina then cites *nihongo ojoozu desu ne* in faster pace and whisper voice (line 10). Example 7.3 illustrates the coarticulation of voice quality and tempo in this dense segment.

Example 7.3. Voice quality and tempo in a segment from Nina's narrative

08 NI: aber japaner sind ja schon wenn > du deinen namen $quasi auf japanisch [sagen (muss)$ <
accelerando *smiling*

09 FL: [$mhmh.$
smiling

10 NI: $ % ja. > nihongo ojoozu des~~u~~ ne. < % $
smiling *whisper* *allegro*

She marks this compliment ostensibly as overreaction to her Japanese, because she emphasizes that she gets compliments when she merely utters her name in Japanese. There are more cues that point to this evaluation of compliment sequences, which I discuss next.

Whisper voice has been described as a voice register that establishes a frame of privacy between speaker and addressee (Sicoli 2015 [2001]: 118). I conducted the interview at Nina's home, where no addressee or overhearer was present. Several interpretations are possible for Nina's use of whisper to cite Japanese voices. She might indeed use whisper voice to enhance the privacy of the utterance, by sharing the compliment only with me, even though there were no other people present. This shared privacy could be grounded in ascribed epistemic status, as she can assume that I know about this enregistered interactional routine. This interpretation gels when considering that my interlocutors' moves of displaying assumptions of shared epistemic status (that is, the indexical presupposition of metadiscourse) occur across speech events (Wortham & Reyes 2021) in interviews independent of each other. Another interpretation could be that Nina tries in this example to imitate this utterance in the way she has heard it on her trip.

In the next lines, Nina describes how she as a foreign traveler and L2 user of Japanese is received by the Japanese people she encountered on her trips. She presents ambivalent stances that she took up from these interactions. She says that she was 'not quite received with open arms' (line 13), but Japanese people valued her efforts to use Japanese with them (line 15). She also explains that the time of her trips to Japan was ten years ago (line 16), at a time when fewer tourists were visiting the country than at the time of the interview in 2023 (line 20). The explanation about the lower number of tourists coming to Japan is a preface for her next turn, in which she describes the reactions toward her Japanese. Nina connects 'foreigner' (*Ausländer*) to individuals from whom Japanese do not expect Japanese competence.

In the next turn, she uses a parallel construction to repeat her presentation of stances (see the following Example 7.4). She says that 'the people were not quite enthusiastic but surprised'

(line 24). She ascribes lower investment to the propositional content of their reaction to her Japanese. The parallelism is built on a syntactic structure with *nich gerade* ('not quite' in the first column in Example 7.3), a gradual negation that functions as a hedge. This is followed by an expression of emotional appreciation and contrast *aber* ('but' in column C) with a micro-pause. This syntactic structure is a hybrid case of concessive-adversative. The second part (in column D) denotes emotional appreciation but indexes a relative degree of interpersonal distance in comparison to the element in B.

Example 7.4. Parallelism in Nina's narrative

	A	B	C	D
1	>nich gerade	mit offenen armen< (.) empfangen	aber, (.)	=japaner wissen das schon zu- zu wertschätzen dass wenn man's ~lernt,~
2	nich gerade	begei:stert	aber (.)	verwundert?

This parallelism configures stances and events. Nina's presentation of her interlocutors' stance of appreciation (segment B) toward her Japanese is downgraded (segment A) with *nich gerade* that reduces the degree of investment. The contrast is made explicit with *aber* (segment C). The presented stance and description of their reaction in the fourth segment (D) appears to be an affective stance with a reduced degree of affiliation toward her Japanese competence. Nina uses *grading* (Kockelman 2016) to reduce affective intensity and portray a nuanced degree of investment into her stance toward Japanese speakers' reactions to L2 Japanese. Through parallelism that syntactically works on gradual contrast, Nina finds a nuanced way to narrate the responses to her efforts of using Japanese as a tourist.

With this mapping of parallel structures, she describes how her Japanese is responded to. She makes another concession, doubting the accuracy of her Japanese (line 28), given that she was still at the beginning of her Japanese language learning at the time of the narrated event. However, she also makes explicit that such accuracy is not what is at stake when people in Japan react to her Japanese (*ob- wie großartig richtig es in dem fall war is dann was anderes* in line 28). Overall, she says that she received 'positive reactions' (*positive reaktionen,* line 31). Here, positive reactions may not directly be related to the evaluation of her competence in Japanese, but rather to her efforts she shows to accommodate to the other. For example, trying to use Japanese without resorting to English that could be available as another choice for communicating. Her reflection on appropriateness, however, also foregrounds an aspect of competence that is not about grammatical accuracy, but about the creation of a fleeting yet

positive *resonance* (Rosa 2016) that emerges in these brief encounters unexpectedly. It is an emotional and intersubjective achievement that nourishes a growing sense of L2 speaker legitimacy.

She enacts the enregistered discourse of being complimented on one's Japanese upon uttering a single word. Regardless of how this discourse actually unfolds in interaction, she cites this interactional routine as illustration of her experience and first moments where she used Japanese in Japan. With this, she creates interdiscursive alignment. Nina animates in parallelism the nuanced reactions to her Japanese, while she overall felt appreciated. Nevertheless, she points out that she quickly receives a *nihongo ojoozu desu ne*, when uttering just a single word or sentence in Japanese. This aligns with what Carlo and Chiara reported (Sections 7.2.1 and 7.2.2) and my own first-hand experiences and anecdotal evidence. Evaluation of competence does not exceed the threshold of substantial assessment from the other, which could lead to L2 users deeming it insincere.

7.2.4 A good speaker of Japanese

The salience of *nihongo ojoozu* compliments appears in examples in which learners take up the subject position ascribed to them and recontextualize this segment. The following example is taken from an interview with Bruno (henceforth abbreviated as BR in the transcript), an Austrian exchange student in the greater Tokyo area. We talked in February 2023 in Tokyo. Some time before this talk, he recorded an interaction with his language exchange partner (*Tandemparner* in German) for my project (see 4.2.3 on this method). Our interview consisted of a playback part and the language portrait activity (see 4.2.4 on these methods). In this interview, he reflects on situations when he explores the city with other exchange students. One topic in the recording was the challenges that international students face in the first months in Japan. Within his group, Bruno positions himself as the one with the highest proficiency in Japanese.

Extract 7.4: Die ausgewählte person

208	FL:	((1,0)) in dem ausschnitt geht es um: (.)	*((1,0)) this excerpt is about: (.)*
209		die infos die man bekommt, am anfang des ehm	*the info you get, at the beginning of uhm*
210		(.) ja von dieser austauschzeit	*(.) yeah of this exchange period*
211	BR:	°°genau.°°	*°°right.°°*
212	FL:	ehm (.)	*uhm (.)*

213		du meintest dass du das meiste verstanden hättest	*you said that you understood most of it*
214		und andere vlleicht nich. also andere: (.)	*and others perhaps not. so other: (.)*
215		ryuugakusee ((1,0)) ehm, ((3,0))	*ryuugakusee ((1,0)) uhm, ((3,0))*
216		die: >ja< die anderen austauschstudierenden	*the: >yeah< the other exchange students*
217		mit den du zusammen zeit verbringst ehm (.)	*with who you spend time together uhm (.)*
218		wie ist deren japanischlevel so ungefähr? ((0,7))	*what's their Japanese level more or less? ((0,7))*
219	BR:	ehm ((1,5)) also:, (.)	*uhm ((1,5)) so:, (.)*
220		ich weiss nicht wie sich das ergeben hat aber: (.)	*I don't know how that came about but: (.)*
221		<der grossteil: ((1,1)) meiner f:reunde, ((3,9))>	*<the majority: ((1,1)) of my f:riends, ((3,9))>*
222		<is: eher auf einem: anfänger:, level> =	*<is: more on a: beginner:, level> =*
223	FL:	=[mhm.	*=[mhm.*
224	BR:	=[also ((6,0)) also eh- eh::	*=[so ((6,0)) so uh- uh::*
225		in unserer uni sind die japanischkurse von	*at our uni the Japanese courses are from*
226		.hh einhundert bis (.) siebenhundert,	*.hh one hundred to (.) seven hundred,*
227	FL:	mhm.	*mhm.*
228		>und siebenhundert ist das höchste.<	*>and seven hundred is the highest.<*
229	FL:	°m↑hm.°	*°m↑hm.°*
230	BR:	ich bin so auf fünfhundert, (.)	*I'm around five hundred, (.)*
231		und die meisten meiner freunde sind auf	*and most of my friends are at*
232		(.) dreihundert zweihundert[( )	*(.) three hundred two hundred [( )*
233	FL:	[okeh hmhm.	*[okeh hmhm.*
234	BR:	ehm ((2,7))	*uhm ((2,7))*
235		das heiss ich sag- (.) hin und wieder scherzhaft	*that means I say- (.) jokingly now and then*
236		dass wenn wir irgendwo hingehen dass: ich die:	*that when we go somewhere tha:t I'm the:*
237		ausgewählte nihongo joozu @ p^{h}er[son bin=	*designated nihongo joozu @ p^{h}er[son @ =*
238	FL:	[((laughs))	*[((laughs))*
239	BR:	=die dann @	*=the one who @*
240		$ die dann als erstes ins res@taurant gehen muss@ zum beispiel. $	*$ the one who @has to enter the restaurant@ first for example. $*
241	FL:	$ .hh okay. [hmhm. $	*$ .hh okay. [hmhm. $*
242	BR:	[ehm ((2,3))	*[uhm ((2,3))*
243		!ja! eben und von denen habe ich dann oft gehört dass sie	*!yeah! right and I've often heard from them that they*
244	FL:	hmhm	*hmhm.*
245	BR:	((1,0)) irgendwelche briefe bekommen haben und	*((1,0)) got some letters and*
246		(.) keine ahnung haben was das ist. [ehm	*(.) have no clue what that is. [uhm*
247	FL:	[okay.	*[okay.*
248		mhm. und für dich war das we:niger ein problem?	*mhm. and for you that was le:ss of a problem?*
249	BR:	((1,6)) für mich war das weniger ein problem	*((1,6)) for me that was less of a problem*

250	für mich war mehr das problem, ((0,9)) ja also	*for me the bigger problem was, ((0,9)) yeah well*
251	((0,7)) also jetzt weniger sprachlich und mehr	*((0,7)) so just less languagewise and more*
252	((0,9)) organisatorisch.=ja.	*((0,9)) organizational.=yeah.*

I refer to the part of the playback that we listened to. The recording is a conversation between Bruno and his language exchange partner. In this recording, they talk about Bruno's group of friends and the issues they encounter in the first months of settling in Japan as exchange students. I am taking a short detour to phrase my question about the Japanese level of his friends, the other 'exchange students' (*ryuugakusee* in Japanese and *austauschstudierenden* in German in lines 215–216).

Bruno thinks about how his group of friends formed. Responding to my question about his friends' Japanese level (line 218), he tells me that most of his friends are 'beginners' (*anfänger*, lines 221–222). He frames these turns in slow pace and pauses, which reflect his careful approach toward making assessments of other people's Japanese abilities. In lines 225–232, he provides evidence for his assessment in form of institutionalized levels of Japanese language classes offered by his university. He gives the range of levels (100 to 700). I register this information new to me with a backchannel "m↑hm" in soft voice (line 229). While his friends are on beginner levels of 200 or 300 (lines 231–232), he is placed within the advanced range of 500 (line 230). These turns serve as background information onto which he briefly builds a scene (lines 235–240). This scene is his group of friends going to a Japanese restaurant. He playfully frames his story, saying 'jokingly' (*das heiss ich sag- (.) hin und wieder scherzhaft* in line 235). He frames the contents of what the narrated self says to his friends with citation, through reported speech that he introduces with 'I say' (*ich sag*). When he and his friends 'go somewhere' (line 236), he positions himself as 'the designated nihongo joozu person' (*die: ausgewählte nihongo joozu person* in lines 236–237). This means he is the person whose Japanese is good. In this turn, he inserts the Japanese *nihongo joozu* into German discourse. He starts laughing after uttering *nihongo joozu*. This leads to distinct aspiration or outbreath of *p*^{h}*erson* (line 237). I immediately follow with laughter (line 238), creating an appreciative alignment with Bruno. The role he invokes here as the one with 'good Japanese' is to enter a restaurant first (lines 239–240). This segment is also framed with smiley voice and some laughter again.

What is so funny about this statement? It appears that Bruno draws on the enregistered discourse of good Japanese, perhaps assuming that I know it and the key indexical expression

in Japanese. He connects this (meta)discourse with him leading the way into a restaurant in a group of exchange students with elementary Japanese level. While he does not provide more details on the scene, we can see that by positively presenting his own competence in Japanese—in a sense, his self-designation—he authorizes himself to manage initial contact with the staff at a Japanese restaurant. For example, this often includes indicating the number of people and seat preferences to the staff. With his higher level of Japanese, Bruno is the chosen one to engage in such interactions. The indexical *nihongo joozu* characterizes a person(a), in this case himself. This account of a compliment differs a bit from the other narratives I presented in this chapter before. Bruno does not recount his experience of interacting with Japanese people here, but uses the *nihongo joozu* as indexical expression to rationalize or even legitimize his position in a social situation, and thus act in a certain way. While he frames his positioning as humorous, his competence in Japanese seems to grant him access to interacting with Japanese individuals, though in perhaps rather transient encounters. He constructs perceptions of his competence *relationally*, through retrospection and comparison with other exchange students who may occupy a subject position similar to his status, as newly arrived sojourners in Japan. Like all other individuals I present here who are L2 users of Japanese, he activates the *good Japanese discourse* when he talks about his lived experiences in Japan. Bruno takes up the subject position that discourses about Japanese and L2 users offer to him, being good enough in Japanese to engage in interactions in daily life. At the same time, his stance conveys a questioning element, encoded through laughing and smiling to which I respond. This allows for an interpretation that Bruno does not take such compliments on (his) Japanese competence too serious. It also functions as a way to diminish self-praise about his competence, as he balances his prior self-positioning as someone with a higher proficiency in comparison to the other exchange students in his group now with a rather playful positioning.

Several observations about the construction of competence perceptions can be made from this extract. Competence is constructed with recourse to institutional level assessments that categorize learners of Japanese. This reminds us that competence is set in a metadiscursive regime that regiments processes of linguistic socialization in institutional settings. I made this observation also in the other empirical chapters (and see Theory Chapter Section 3.5). Bruno *compares* himself to his friends, highlighting the relationality of competence. He also engages in *perspectivation*, focusing the lens of his personal view as someone with an allegedly higher proficiency in Japanese, when contrasting institutionalized

abilities.[77] Interactionally, we also co-construct his perceptions of competence, which becomes evident in the following turns (starting from line 243).

He expands on comparison a bit further in the next sequence. He tells me that he has heard from his friends that they had sometimes trouble understanding official letters written in Japanese (lines 243 & 245–246). I participate in constructing Bruno's perceived competence in Japanese. I ask him whether letters in Japanese would be 'less of a problem' for him (*und für dich war das we:niger ein problem?* in line 248). Bruno confirms that language was 'less of a problem' for him, establishing *dialogic resonance* (Du Bois 2014) with my turn through repetition (line 249, *für mich war das weniger ein problem*). He elaborates and says that rather the overall organization and settling when he arrived for his exchange year was challenging for him (lines 252–252). This was one topic in the playback segment we discussed. In this segment, he talked with his buddy about the challenges during the first months in Japan.

In this example, Bruno evokes two dimensions by using the enregistered *nihongo joozu* discourse. First, he contributes to the further circulation of this indexical expression, by explicitly recontextualization. He can assume that I know this phrase, but what is even more revealing here, is that he can also assume that I know the experience of receiving such compliments as an L2 user of Japanese. In other words, he can draw on my metapragmatic awareness of this metadiscourse to construct his stance toward his own competence. Second, by the way Bruno constructs this narrative about a snippet of his daily life, he positions himself as a legitimate and sufficiently competent user of Japanese (Takeuchi 2023b). Though his laughing indicates that he does not entirely align himself with a positive evaluation of his own competence, he authorizes his claim to legitimacy through bringing up this enregistered discursive element. The paraverbal cues illustrate how he narratively distinguishes speaking selves.

7.3 Discussion: Being part, yet different

How do learners perceive compliments for their Japanese and how to they respond? The examples I presented in this chapter show that this interactional sequence bears relevance to

[77] Be reminded that the concepts of *comparison* and *perspective* are fundamental to Gal & Irvine's (2019) formulation of the semiotic processes underlying linguistic differentiation.

L2 users of Japanese and influences their perceptions of competence in various ways. Compliment sequences, however, are about much more than an L2 user's Japanese competence.

7.3.1 The paradox of good Japanese

The examples suggest that L2 users of Japanese may evaluate compliments on their Japanese as insincere, because they occur when the other subjectively does not have epistemic access to make informed evaluations of their L2 competence. The consequences of compliment responses are affected by distribution of entitlements to carry out this speech act, even though I am aware that I only focus on the L2 user's perspective and their understanding of these entitlements here. Diverging interpretations of epistemic access with regard to competence and its implication to address it in interaction engenders interactional asymmetry that may manifest in disaffiliation toward each other (Enfield 2011).[78] But this is just a hypothesis. The metadiscourse of *nihongo ojoozu desu ne* that flows through media and exchanges in international communities could have a greater influence on reproducing it in the interview context than first-hand experiences of this interactional sequence. I showed this by presenting examples in which my interlocutors array this discourse with other stereotypical behavior that Japanese people are ostensibly exhibiting when interacting with "foreigners."

The metadiscourse about complimenting Japanese skills is not about good or bad Japanese. However, it is also not so much about L2 users' evaluations of sincerity of a compliment. It is about the effects of an enregistered discursive sequence, the continuous process of social recontextualization, and its implications for identity and belonging as a migrant in Japan. The empirical analysis shows that all four interlocutors Carlo, Chiara, Nina, Bruno, as well as me, *normalize* their experiences of receiving compliments, but this normalization serves different functions. Carlo uses it to claim being part of the community while acknowledging difference; Chiara distinguishes between sincere friends and strangers in comments about her Japanese; Nina frames early experiences positively while recognizing their superficiality; Bruno jokingly subverts associations of self-praise. By framing

[78] See Fujihira (2024) for an overview of studies on *asymmetries* in contact situations of L1 and L2 users of Japanese.

stereotypical compliments of Japanese competence as ordinary they can position themselves as resisting against marginalization practices that force non-Japanese individuals into peripheries of society (Kroo 2022). The use of quotidian framing allows to publicly take control of one's utterance within a degree of *agency* (Kockelman 2007), forging interpretations of Japanese communicative behavior. The stances on compliment sequences make these interactions appear like a *routine*, a "pre-established pattern of action which is unfolded during a performance and which may be presented or played through on other occasions" (Goffman 1959: 16). Receiving a *good Japanese* thus becomes a normalized experience going beyond questions about the evaluation of language competence per se, but forms into an interactional metapragmatic practice.

This experiences is based on relations of difference (Irvine & Gal 2000). Relations of difference fractally recur on other scales of discourse, as alterity is constructed beyond the speech event in which the compliment sequence occurs. It is projected from the narrating event onto the narrated event, for example, when gossiping with other L2 users about one's experiences with such compliments. The narratives reveal not only the narrators' experiences of competence, because it is not exactly about competence in the sense of linguistic proficiency or fluency, but how relations between speakers with different backgrounds are intersubjectively constructed. Compliments thus serve as acts of subjectivation or subject formation. Complimenting on good Japanese is a semiotic process that highlights difference. Structurally, these stances are encoded by drawing on different calibrations of metapragmatic functionalities (Silverstein 2021, see also Section 3.4.1 in the Theory Chapter). *Reflexive calibration* emerges, for example, in repetition and parallelism. *Reportive calibration* is a citational repetition of the enregistered discursive sequence—the varieties of *nihongo ojooozu desu ne* that come up in the extracts. Citations yield alterity stances. Through citing the voices of Japanese interlocutors, L2 speakers enact their experiences of interacting in Japanese with other Japanese speakers. Finally, *nomic calibration* configures metapragmatic stereotypes and rationalization of Japanese behavior as normalized, a stereotypic interaction is made into a recognizable routine. All these functionalities intersect in the examples I analyzed here.

7.3.2 Accountability and legitimation

When reporting on their experiences with compliments, speakers attribute intentionality to others, i.e., the individuals who enact compliments. For example, the L2 users in this chapters position their interlocutors who make compliments as engaging in stereotypical behavior that Japanese individuals allegedly show when interacting with non-Japanese individuals. The Japanese tendency to rashly praise an L2 user's Japanese competence seems to be normal, ordinary, and unmarked, but also not taken as a serious compliment. We need to ask, then: where is the threshold a compliment must exceed so that the receiver perceives it as (in)sincere? How do interactants hold each other accountable for their contributions to compliment sequences? Or is it not the compliment itself, but rather a reaction to the enregistered discourse that leads to a critical stance toward such type of compliments?

In the data I present here, perceived insincerity itself is not made into an issue. Nor do my interlocutors present such behavior as belittling or describe an opposite effect of complimenting, even though Jun's comment on absence of talk about her Japanese points toward this. Rather, it appears that my interlocutors ascribe neither positive nor negative motivations to these compliments. In their view, what is absent would be a cue that a compliment is justified. They recognize the rituality of this interchange and react with their ritual part (Goffman 1955). At the same time, this compliment sequence is presented as typical Japanese, even as a part of Japanese character. More precisely, we can understand such characterizations as *figures of personhood* (Park 2021a). These figures are stereotyped Japanese people who exhibit a certain behavior. Hence, such metadiscourse is enregistered over a broader domain and L2 users of Japanese project their ideologies about Japanese behavior in the narrative interview with me. They present Japanese individuals' rash complimenting and surprise when encountering foreigners who can speak Japanese, as well as other cultural practices (e.g., using chopsticks or appreciating four seasons) as stereotypical topics in conversation, especially in first-time encounters. In doing so, they attribute a stance of naivete toward Japanese who interact with foreigners. However, I am only looking at L2 users' perspective. It is also possible that they internalize modesty or being self-conscious about their Japanese. The perspective I offer here is that of a lived experience and how such an experience is reframed in the interview context. Making sense of compliment sequences hinges on claims to legitimacy.

Legitimate speakerhood, however, goes beyond competence. Even proficient speakers of a language may be denied legitimacy, due to their perceived racial or cultural background (Ostheider 2005; Smith 2015; Takeuchi 2023b). My own rationalization of compliment experiences and my interlocutors' experiences suggest that being perceived as a white person might influence assumptions about Japanese competence and therefore trigger comments about good Japanese.[79] The Japanese individuals my interlocutors talk about are presumably all native speakers of Japanese. Native speakers find themselves in a position to claim entitlement to evaluate language competence and therefore grant or deny access to speaker legitimacy (Bourdieu 1991; Doerr 2009a; Liddicoat 2016).

In order to understand how legitimation is perceived, we must turn our attention to metapragmatic absence. Interlocutors describe not receiving any comments on their competence as legitimization of their Japanese. No attention to competence is therefore perceived as being accepted as a legitimate user of Japanese. This absence is made relevant, precisely because absent comments about Japanese are perceived as tacit acceptance and authorization of L2 speakerhood. Metapragmatic absence emerges in a space of potentiality and desire. Because there is a chance or possibility that an L2 user could be complimented on their Japanese, they appreciate (or even wish for) the absence of compliments.

The ambivalent experiences of one's own competence reflect saliently in contrastive parallelism: you have four seasons, speak Japanese well, you can use chopsticks; other people say *joozu* while friends don't tell me anything; people were not quite enthusiastic but surprised about my first attempts of using Japanese as a tourist. Borrowing here the voices of my interlocutors (who themselves borrow others' voices), I claim that parallelism reveals moments where issues of competence were at stake are relived and performed in the narrative.

7.3.3 Contextual realms

What does an analysis of narratives of about compliment sequences offer for our understanding of lived experiences? As in the other empirical chapters, space and time

[79] Note how, for example, Japanese Americans encountered contradicting expectations about their proficiency in Japanese in Takamori's (2015) ethnography. Being socialized in the US, their "accented" Japanese was sometimes evaluated as strange. They were confronted by people in Japan with looking like a Japanese person, but not linguistically or culturally behaving in a Japanese way.

emerge as metapragmatic anchors to understand perceptions of competence in Japanese. We see that these sequences emerge in first-time encounters (as Carlo reported), perhaps mostly in public spaces. Friends and colleagues may be less inclined to reproduce this interactional routine in the same way with the enregistered *nihongo ojoozu desu ne*, as Chiara and Nina told us. Bruno transports this metadiscourse into his self-positioning in contrast to other learners of Japanese when entering a restaurant. The linguistic resources my interlocutors draw on in their narratives about this discursive routine include indexicals that point to *immediacy*. For example, latching of turns and allegro or accelerando pace when reporting compliment sequences.

It seems that relational distance is a condition that heightens the possibility of occurrence of this routine. The public domain therefore constitutes another arena of competence constructions. This construction emerges in interactions, within ongoing reflexive monitoring of discursive exchanges, but also in retrospective reflection about one's position(ing) within the social context of being a foreigner in Japan. We can assume that boundary maintenance through complimenting emerges in the public realm because it is discursively structured though ideologies of exclusiveness or Japaneseness. The pathways of ideologies that position individuals inside or outside an imagined Japanese nation can be traced in face-to-face encounters. Japanese competence functions as metapragmatic anchor to leverage a Japanese identity and "foreign" alterity. Practices of normalization function in this domain in two ways. First, experiential normalization of L2 speakers of Japanese visible in the public yields, second, discursive normalization (i.e., *enregisterment*) of complimenting routines and responses. The findings from narratives about this type of stereotypical discourse presented in this chapter might mirror the broader social attitude toward migration in Japan. While Japan has adapted to immigration in a practical way, its ideological resistance and identity binary remain significant obstacles to becoming a fully inclusive immigrant country (Liu-Farrer 2025). Sediments of such attitudes thus surface in interactions of L1 and L2 users of Japanese.

The public domain is therefore also a sphere of subjectivation. It is a site where L2 users of Japanese do not only come to inhabit a certain subject position, but in which they are made into competent speaking subjects. The ideological face of competence across a subject's repertoire becomes evident here. While an intuitive interpretation of compliments about good Japanese would categorize them as appreciation or positive evaluation of the effort a learner makes, compliments implicitly ascribe a subject position as someone different to

"other" speakers of Japanese. Competence, as I hope I could show, may be explicitly evaluated with qualitative expressions such as "good," but rather functions as means to maintain boundaries that are delineated with reference to language competence. Being subjected with and through compliment sequences thus becomes another lived experience of language for L2 speakers in Japan.

7.4 Conclusion

Nihongo ojoozu desu ne operates as a boundary-maintenance ritual that positions the foreigner as perpetual outsider even while ostensibly complimenting fluency, on the denotational surface. This surface is a proposition that presupposes that what it states is not to be expected or taken for granted, otherwise it would not have to be stated in the first place. My interlocutor's narratives about this compliment sequence as ordinary is a discursive strategy to resists being treated as someone different—an alterity stance that is a response to an alterity stance. Through quotidian framing, an individual positions themselves within their ordinary perception of how individuals in Japan communicate.

Interacting in Japanese is a source of experiencing alterity, and my interlocutors make it relevant in their stories about past interactions and generalizations about interacting with Japanese. L2 users of Japanese make sense of their competence via this discourse and interactional routine that can be seen as an enregistered positioning practice in interactions of Japanese speakers and those who are perceived as non-Japanese. However, this practice is made into a resource for understanding and asserting their legitimacy as speakers and non-Japanese individuals in Japan. Normalized, ordinary experiences are expressed through "ordinary enactments of language" (Ochs 2012: 142), most saliently parallelism and citational practices such as double-voiced discourse. The discursive sequence of *nihongo ojoozu desu ne* moves from being an index that points to evaluative interpretations of competence to being a symbol, a conventionalized sign. This sign, in turn, becomes reindexicalized, but rather pointing to a stance of alterity.

Being part, yet different shows in how normalized experiences of being made into someone different are for newcomers, sojourners, and migrants in Japan. They might mirror a broader trend in Japan's slow transformation into an immigrant society. Difference lingers on, but not as a boundary impossible to overstep. It could be evidence for a gradual yet fragmented diversification of Japanese language users in Japan.

8 Discussion: Speaking of Competence as a Lived Experience of Language

8.1 Introduction: Synthesizing findings across experiences

Having presented case studies of lived experiences of language in Japan, I now discuss the findings in light of previous studies and the theoretical-methodological foundation on which this work is based. The empirical chapters present examples of three areas of experience that individuals enter in Japan: intimate and private domains, the professional world, as well as public domains. In all examples, my interlocutors narrate events in which *legitimate speakerhood* is contested in interactions with others. However, as the analysis has revealed, these different domains are interconnected, as they constitute stakes that all hold the structure of lived experiences together (see Section 1.6 in the Introduction Chapter). The domains are also not primarily constituted through space and time, but discourse. What runs through all case studies are processes of *differentiation* (Gal & Irvine 1995; Irvine & Gal 2000) that emerge in Japanese-as-L2-users' perceptions and narrative constructions of alterity. These perceptions and constructions are connected to ideas about communicative competence, yet not only in Japanese, but across the whole linguistic repertoire.

In this chapter, I revisit articulations of *competence* in light of my findings. I also review the linguistic and communicative resources that my interlocutors employ to build a stance with and toward competence. First, I review what aspects of competence are mobilized by the individuals' whose lived experiences I analyzed in the empirical part. I answer my first research (and partly my third) question, outlining the objects of competence my interlocutors make relevant in discourse about their experiences of living in Japan. Second, I focus on my second and third research questions and review *how they encode such aspects* in discourse, summarizing the linguistic resources for stancetaking in their narratives of moments where issues of competence are/were at stake. This shifts the focus to *performance*. Third, I broaden the view onto my fourth research question to answer what metapragmatic practices can tell

us about migrants' identification and belonging to Japan, and how domains intersect within their experiences. I interweave this discussion with some reflections on methods and methodology.

I orient the discussion along the competence–performance axis—yet not to reify this distinction. It reflects the relationship between form and content, denotational and indexical, and pragmatic and metapragmatic that can only be grasped in tandem. This reflects also the nexus in the *metapragmatic stancetaking* model: evaluating language use while performing language use (Spitzmüller 2012, 2013a, 2022a).

8.2 Competence: Moorings for ideological work

To answer what perceptions do migrants in Japan have of their and others' competences across their repertoire, I identified dimensions of competence that emerged during my engagement with my interlocutors. I suggest a metaphorical view on speakers' mobilizations of aspects of competence in discourse as *moorings for ideological work*. Moorings ground ideas about speakers, their characteristics, and their behavior (Enfield & Zuckerman 2024). I hold that perceptions of communicative competence emerge out of *ideological work* (Gal & Irvine 2019). Ideological work permeates several levels in the data. I first revisit the notion of competence, before I discuss aspects of competence that emerged in the data.

The main aim of this thesis is to propose a metapragmatic-sociolinguistic perspective on competence in and across languages in an L2 Japanese context. Researchers have long been concerned with (re-)defining the concept of competence (Section 3.5.1). Le Page & Tabouret-Keller offer a compelling synthesis of some aspects of a formulation of competence:

> In this book we have been working towards a general theory concerning the way in which linguistic performance—what people actually say—is related on the one hand to their competence—that is the systems they have built up which motivate what they say and which they use to project their view of themselves in relation to the universe in which they feel they live and the social structures it contains; and on the other, to the stereotypes and abstractions and idealized models which both linguists and non-linguists have about 'languages' and about 'speech or language communities.' (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985: 247)

Competence and perceptions thereof are situated in individuals and their conceptions of the social world. It emerges in observable patterned performances, i.e., practices and the ideas and assumptions people hold about such practices. This quote thus aptly shows that

performance and metapragmatics seep into competence. Since this formulation, sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists have revisited, critiqued, and revised (communicative) competence (see, for example, Briggs 1988; Canagarajah 2022; Flores & Rosa 2022; Kataoka et al. 2013). I will respond to these revisions when I present my findings on competence below.

8.2.1 The force of metapragmatic calibration

To investigate competence perceptions and their relationship to ideologies of communication, the metapragmatic framework has proven essential. I concede with Briggs, who tells us that "metapragmatics does not simply enable us to disambiguate reference or to calibrate inferential processes—metapragmatics provides essential means of connecting discourse with lived experience" (Briggs 1993: 207). Metapragmatics thus does not only provide the interpretative frame for interaction (Silverstein 1993), but substantially influences L2 speakers' lives in Japan.

Katharina and Takashi make language choices into a topic of discussion and contestation. Nina consciously gauges adequate politeness and efficient communication at her workplace. Carlo and Chiara, as well as myself, experience compliments on our Japanese competence in public. Explicit metapragmatics constantly flows through our lives. Metapragmatics regiments language use in a romantic relationship, rendering a gendered imbalance in language choice. It regiments professional relationships and efficiency in the neoliberal professional world. It regiments the positioning of subjects and their places and roles in Japanese society. It regiments the design and structure of my ethnographic project, my relationships in the field, and the final entextualization as a doctoral thesis.

Positioning vis-à-vis issues related to language are ubiquitous in all domains of life. In the examples I examined, there are several cases in which explicit articulations about language use are made. The implications of such metapragmatic articulations need contextualization, going beyond language. Recall Park's (2021a) useful triad for metapragmatic analysis: *time*, *space*, and *affect* that permeate many layers of metapragmatic stancetaking in all examples. I briefly summarize some examples here.

Time: Tracing the pathway of Katharina and Takashi's relationship and the negotiations and changes they make in their language choice. We can zoom in to specific narrated moments, for example, the time when she comes back home, bringing Japanese ("sometimes")

into their private space—and is met by his insistence on English. Parallel to the couple's temporally changing rhythms in language choice, Nina makes time and cadences relevant at several instances of her workplace narratives. The examples range from explicit mentioning the expressions *time* and *time-consuming* routines, to the prosodic and rhythmic encoding of her stance in her narrative of lived experiences of competences. Time also becomes relevant in first-time encounters that my interlocutors tell me about when interacting with Japanese speakers.

Space: Katharina and Takashi mention that space interacts with their language choices, for example the different language configurations at their workplaces and at home. Also using English on the train to shield their conversation from others is one example of how space interact with metapragmatic choices. Nina is mostly concerned with how she uses language at the office and on the workplace messenger, which often requires *keigo* as a language she distinguishes from normal Japanese (which she uses in different contexts with her friends). And when being complimented on one's Japanese, new speakers of Japanese often find themselves in public places interacting with strangers.

Affect: I only briefly touch on affect here as speakers' responses that exhibit an emotional disposition toward the stance object. I review emotions in more detail in Section 8.4.2. They include resignation and frustration with communicative troubles that my interlocutors report as well as humorous and creative ways of metapragmatic calibration, such as using cute German words or presenting oneself as the good Japanese speaking person that guides a group of newly arrived exchange students into a Japanese restaurant.

In essence, metapragmatics loops back to the experiences we have as human beings in the world. Language (and) competence is often rather a subsidy to divert the discourse from questions such as gender relations, workplace hierarchies, race, and citizenship. Here, we can see the apparent connection to ideologies, of communication or other sort, which are never about language alone (e.g., Woolard & Schieffelin 1994: 55–56). I will discuss ideologies more systematically in the following sections.

8.2.2 Native speakers and legitimacy

The most pervasive or dominant ideology with respect to language competence is the idea that a native speaker is the only legitimate speaker of Japanese. Across all three empirical chapters, speakers talk about how these ideologies affect L2 user legitimacy. As has been aptly

shown for the Japanese context (Houghton & Rivers 2013; Takeuchi 2020a, 2020b, 2023b), the figure of the native speaker serves as the yardstick to which competence is measured.

Takashi exhibits reluctance to use Japanese with Katharina. He claims that communicating with her in Japanese is "annoying," and suggests that she becomes "a little bit different person" when speaking Japanese. These features all reflect a native speaker's bias that positions L2 varieties as deficient rather than as legitimate forms of linguistic practice. In this case, the figure of the native Japanese speaker is activated through switch into English, away from Japanese. This figure claims entitlement to define language choices and practices. Katharina materializes this figure metaphorically as a "wall" (Extract 5.9 in Chapter 5), representing the barrier she faces in their language negotiations. While German as a linguistic resource is less powerful in their relationship, she can still enact an expert role in situations where she teaches him German words. However, this resource is marginalized and restricted to certain contexts.

Nina elevates native speakers of Japanese to a higher position, saying that even her Japanese co-workers need to check their correct *keigo* usage (Chapter 6). She also positions native speakers, albeit implicitly, as unaware of the L2 users' communicative challenges. This impression could be linked to Takashi's behavior, who shows less accommodation to his partner. The native speaker is thus characterized as proficient in the legitimate variety but oblivious to experiences of migrants. Their competences exceed the boundaries of where Japanese legitimacy seems to apply.

Most overtly, the figure of the native speaker surfaces in narratives about receiving compliments on Japanese proficiency (Chapter 7). Legitimate personae can perform surprise when they encounter a non-Japanese individual who can speak Japanese. Japanese speakers, in this line of thought, can thus gatekeep their language when interacting with L2 users of Japanese. The idea that learners can be viewed as legitimate speakers of Japanese not different from those who are perceived and positioned as natives is thus erased or absent.

The underlying semiotic process that stabilizes discrete stances of alterity into more perduring articulations of speakerhood ideologies is *rhematization* (Gal & Irvine 2019: 19). By this semiotic process, interpretations about qualities of personae and practices of "native" and "non-native" speakers of Japanese are made into the very essence of being "Japanese" or a "foreigner." However, "good Japanese," for example, is just a label for an imagined variety of Japanese. In the examples I presented here, it us mostly used by Japanese people to label the

Japanese of European individuals. Yet the L2 users of Japanese also claim the label themselves, as, for example Bruno describes himself jokingly as 'the designated *nihongo ojoozu* person.'

8.2.3 Register ideologies

In my investigation, L2 users are particularly concerned about the use of one register in Japanese: *keigo*. For example, Nina links *keigo* to ascriptions of time and investment in workplace discourse. She and Katharina tell us that this register is normatively required at the workplace, but, at the same time, not the "normal" variety of Japanese. In Katharina's view, mastering *keigo* allows her to become an accepted and legitimate member of the workplace. Nina states that selecting sufficiently polite expressions in Japanese consumes time, even for her co-workers who are native speakers. Longer morphosyntactic structures, as well as a lack of confidence in employing and implementing tokens from this register pose an extra burden on communicative routines at a busy workplace. While being aware that *keigo* is required in workplace communication, Nina exhibits a critical stance toward its utility. This is confirmed, for example, by Moody (2018: 795) who reported on L2 users critical evaluations of honorifics. This contrasts with traditionally dominant *keigo* ideologies that present it as a tool for "smooth communication" (Carroll 2005).

Considering such a link between language and identity that becomes apparent in *keigo* register, L2 users' reinterpretations, adaptations, and resistance toward incorporating honorific forms into their own speech becomes even more complex. *Keigo* establishes distinctions between Japanese and non-Japanese, against the background of its sociohistorical formation, as *keigo* was "naturalized as something that had always been present in 'Japanese'" (Okamoto & Shibamoto-Smith 2016: 129). What is more, L2 users may lack full awareness of *keigo*'s indexical potentials, or may hold alternative interpretations of its functions (Barke & Shimazu 2022). Though speakers interpret honorifics diversely, the ideology persists that *keigo* follows normative rules with correct usage patterns (Okamoto & Shibamoto-Smith 2016: 155). Through normativity, *keigo* competence becomes a resource for boundary-maintenance, inclusion, and exclusion.

8.2.4 Nihonjinron reloaded?

The ideologies discussed above reveal assumptions about uniqueness and unity of Japanese identity, long prominent in *nihonjinron* discourses (Section 2.2). Strikingly, it is the L2 users themselves, typically marginalized as foreigners, who reiterate and reinforce these stereotypical discourses about Japanese identity, even as they experience marginalization from it. The personae they activate in discourse include the *polite Japanese person* who is surprised by diversity—in seasons in other countries, Japanese competence, eating with chopsticks —when encountering foreigners. It is a person who is reluctant to accept L2 Japanese as a legitimate variety of Japanese. I intentionally present these aspects here a bit oversimplified and undifferentiated, because I want to suggest that they reflect fragments of *nihonjinron* discourses that still circulate via various channels, such as Japanese language education abroad as well as situated interactional experiences. Subsequently, they flow into L2 users' minds and may be recirculated through them. Recirculation is paired with critical reflection on stereotypical discourses about Japanese culture, as has been shown by Pizziconi & Iwasaki (2024).

Discourse about metapragmatic communicative practices peculiar to Japanese have emphasized *consideration for others* and *anticipatory inference* (Fukushima & Haugh 2014; Haugh 2007). Such emphasis on intersubjective, empathetic attunement is often rhematized into the essential quality of "Japaneseness." Notably, Nina criticizes her Japanese colleagues for "not thinking ahead," failing to anticipate customer needs. This is a contradiction to common emic understandings of Japanese politeness. Regardless of how professionals at Nina's workplace actually treat these procedures, Nina leverages such contradiction to position herself as more thoughtful than her native-speaking colleagues.

8.2.5 Beyond grammar: Reflexivity and intersubjectivity

Aligning with a majority of recent work in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, I hold that the concept of *(communicative) competence* needs to be reconceptualized beyond normatively appropriate uses of grammar in a linguistic system (Kataoka et al. 2013). Perceived competence, which involves reflexive engagement with one's own performance, depends on how speakers anticipate others' judgments of them, as it is something narrators *ascribe* to themselves or others (Rydell 2018). These ascriptions are played out in *expressibility* and *understanding*. Competence is thus always mediated through ideologies of

communication (Grosser et al. 2025; Spitzmüller 2022a), as "competence is used as an extremely pervasive but frequently overlooked index for one's identity and social status" (Park 2010: 23).

Katharina and Takashi's negotiation of understanding and (non-)willingness to understand the other is evidence for the distributed nature of competence and perceptions thereof. Recall how Katharina repeatedly addresses misunderstandings ("you cannot understand my Japanese") in couple talk and the interviews. The issue goes beyond competence in a strict sense, which becomes evident, for example, in Takashi's claim that Katharina becomes a "different person" when using Japanese. Both she and Takashi attempt to repair and ensure understanding through multilingual strategies, resorting to English.

Nina reflects on her competence to perform speech acts in different ways to align with the matrix language in interaction with Japanese-using team members in customer support, or English-using colleagues from the global department. She presents herself as aware of the communicative routines required in Japanese workplace discourse. *Keigo* as well as code-switching calls for a high metapragmatic awareness, emerging through intersubjective moment-by-moment attunement (Duranti 2017) toward the other, be it customers, colleagues, or superiors. Nina also tries to anticipate and solve future potential problems through foresight. Such foresight requires continuous reflection and flexibility to adjust one's communicative behavior to the context and relation.

L2 users of Japanese evince in their narratives similar interpretations of *nihongo ojoozu desu ne*. This enregistered routine interactionally structures the subject positions right from the start, as Carlo tells us in his narrative. It just needs a single word, such as saying "hello," or ordering at a café, or telling one's name (Nina's example). Japanese is good not because of a substantial certification, but because competence is *ascribed*. In this process, ascriptions go beyond evaluation of linguistic capabilities and take on different functions such as boundary maintenance and redrawing. What is important here, however, is that my interlocutors *experience* this sequence as a routine through which they are positioned as L2 users. In turn, this is presented as an enregistered practice and character trait of Japanese people (as Chiara does).

Competence thus emerges through perceptions, assumptions, and expectations about how someone communicates. These expectations are negotiated, as they are located on a continuum of convergence and divergence. Clashes in expectations occur due to divergent *contextualization conventions* (Gumperz 1992: 51), as it is called in interactional

sociolinguistics, or different socializations into the normative systems of language use (Neustupný 2005).

While I have focused my analyses rather on aspects of verbal communication, writing is of course interwoven with ideas about competence as well. In Nina's example, competence emerges across different modes, as she talks about her interactions on the workplace messenger and communication with customers via e-mail. Bruno briefly talks about how other exchange students are struggling with official letters in Japanese. Obviously, being able to listen to and speak Japanese, and being able to write and read, do not necessarily develop synchronously. Detailed analysis of literacy goes beyond the scope of this thesis but offers avenues for future research on lived experience of communicative competence across communicative modes.

8.3 Performance: Resources for stancetaking

To answer *how* L2 users of Japanese relate their experiences, I attended to an array of indexical expressions that they employ to contextualize their stances. These resources come on stage in *performance*. Performances are displayed actions that give an "impression of reality" (Goffman 1959: 56) to an audience. The analysis has shown that citational practices, embodied indexical iconicity, repetition and parallelism, comparison, normalization, intensity and investment, and ascriptions of intentionality are linguistic resources for stancetaking. While interconnected, these resources range from intimate, embodied dimensions of expression, such as the voice (an interior cline, sensu Eckert 2019), but also cover syntactic features, such as repetition and syntactic parallelism. All resources are interconnected and often co-occurring or co-constitutive.

The aim is to connect an interactional-linguistic examination of linguistic form in narrative discourse as being in co-relationship (indexical relationship) with discourses of identity and alterity in social life.

8.3.1 Alterity and difference

As we have seen, competence semiotically operates via *alterity*, through the semiotic process of *differentiation*. Inoue gives us a cue for understanding the implications of such constructions of subjective difference: "The construction of modern subjectivity is

constituted in relation to an alterity—the other is not an accidental by-product but is a necessary condition for the modern self" (Inoue 2006: 49). L2 encounter as well as delineate differences toward such constitutions of subjectivity.

While certainly an ideological process, differentiation is also a discursive tactic (Bucholtz & Hall 2004) that my interlocutors enact in the data. In the examples I examined, speakers highlight differences in stancetaking, e.g., to a partner (Katharina), colleagues and superiors (Nina), familiar and unfamiliar people (Carlo and Chiara), other exchange students (Bruno), and to "native" Japanese individuals. What is important here is that they take these stances specifically in events in which they address competence in Japanese, English, or German. I review the linguistic resources in detail in the next sections.

8.3.2 Stance accretion and choices

Choices in language use can now be recontextualized with connection to *stance accretion*. Choices become stabilized and enduring through repeated or habitual control and enhancement of specific sign configurations (Damari 2010). For example, reducing of Japanese in favor for English in the case of Takashi and Katharina became an accreted stance that formed into a stable (yet not uncontested) practice for couple talk. Nina presents communicative practices at the workplace as accreted stances through which speakers position themselves as affirmative toward indirect Japanese discourse or more direct English discourse.

Another example of an enduring stance is the *nihongo ojoozu desu ne* discourse, the discourse of *good Japanese*. As an enregistered practice, receiving compliments on their Japanese has become a quotidian experience for L2 users. In the examples, they present it as accreted stances that Japanese speakers take toward L2 users. This discursive sequence is so widely recognized as typical routine in first-time encounters that hinges on alleged competence in Japanese. However, as my interlocutors portray it, it is rather a stereotypical association that becomes stabilized as a choice L1 users of Japanese resort to navigate this context. This can be seen as a perhaps extreme form of sedimentation of accreted stances toward L2 competence.

8.3.3 Prosodic cues and embodied indexical iconicity

I found that prosodic emphasis correlates to—in other words, iconically mirrors—lived experience. The co-textual signs rely on sound and include prosody and rhythm that are metrically organized. As the voice is anchored in a speaking body, indexical icons that rely on voice modulation can be understood as *embodied indexical icons* (Thompson 2016). Voice modulation is a resource for building a stance while simultaneously indexing a stance.

For examples, Katharina invokes the metaphor of an English wall, a barrier that she faces when coming back home from work. "Wall" is uttered in louder voice and stressed—icons for the imaginative materiality of the size and quality of a wall. This stress, combined with the referential meaning of *wall* is configured in assembly with other indexicals that I identify in the segments. Together, they point toward broader interactional asymmetries in their relationship.

Emphasis and elongation of the indexical expression *zeit* 'time' in Nina's narrative reveal a relationship between the meaning of time perceptions and her subjective experience of communicative practices: *keigo braucht so:: viel zei:t* ('keigo needs so:: much ti:me' in Extract 6.3). Longer duration at the workplace correlates with longer vowel quality.

Modulation of quality in voice registers, for example, creaky voice, used by Katharina or whisper, used by Nina, map the modulation of vibrations of vocal cords onto oscillations of narrated experience. They index affective stances, creaky voice indexes resignation, while whisper is used to establish a more private frame.

Aligning with Ochs (2012), I view utterances and their phonetic encoding as reflections of how individuals perceive their world. Recalling her model of indexicality (Ochs 1992), speakers employ co-textual signs—lexical items and their phonetic articulation—to create a stance that, in turn, indexes a speaker's relations of identity and alterity that are fundamental to lived experiences.

8.3.4 Citational practices

Citational practices are salient, denotationally explicit resources to convey a performance. Citations are marked through explicit introduction with verbs of saying or thinking or marker such as "like" or Nina's *ja*. Additionally, suprasegmentals and voice modulation, for example, higher pitch (Günthner 2002; Klewitz & Couper-Kuhlen 1999; Tannen 2007 [1989]) are used. L2 users insert segments of constructed speech to exert epistemic authority,

especially in contexts where they are assessed by others (Holt 2006). Citational practices do not only narratively transport the audience into scenes of using language in Japan, but allows speakers to present themselves in terms of morality and agency (De Fina & Georgakopoulou 2012: 169).

Katharina shows efforts for investing more time in using Japanese. She reports her thoughts several times in our interviews. She talks about the moments when she comes back home from work, "okay for the next five minutes i try to stay in japanese" (Extract 5.7). In this way, she constructs a stance through which she can portray her willingness to use more Japanese. The figure of the represented discourse is *transparent* (Zuckerman 2021), i.e., composed in such a way that her narrated self is made explicit in the citing event. At the same time, this stance exhibits the struggle that she faces when she tries to use Japanese with her partner, when she "keeps going" after using Japanese at her workplace. Citation transports us into these challenging moments in her private life.

Nina makes extensive use of citational repetition in her narrative of workplace interactions. By imitating and animating a polite request sequence in Japanese, she exhibits epistemic access to this certain register. At the same time, she makes critical assessments through citation. She contrasts the Japanese request sequence with an English one and she conveys her reflexivity toward communicative routines as well as her evaluations through such citations.

My interlocutors also cite the direct discourse of compliments they have received about their Japanese. For example, *(nihongo) (o)joozu desu ne* replicates a past narrated event and enregistered metadiscourse. Carlo, Chiara, Nina, and Bruno, they all encountered this phrase, switching into Japanese from either English or German matrix language in the interview. These cases also exemplify duplex functions of citational repetition, involving construction of represented voices and repeating an enregistered interactional sequence.

8.3.5 Repetition, parallelism, rhythm

Jakobson (1960) described the poetic function as one dimension of language use. L2 users of Japanese draw on resources of metricalization to illustrate their experiences of interacting with Japanese individuals. Katharina hedges Takashi's claim that he "sometimes" tries to reply in Japanese (Extract 5.9). She takes up his expression and recycles it to build her own stance. In their Japanese discourse, they establish *dialogic resonance* (Du Bois 2014) across turns,

taking up resources of negation, frequency, and the key evaluative indexical *mendookusai* ('annoying') to build a new stance. Katharina takes up the Takashi's performative attempts to use German (for example, *pinguin*) within our interview and evaluates his pronunciation. By drawing on this parallel structure, she positions herself as expert in German, as someone who can authorize or illegitimize his language learning and using.

Nina uses parallel constructions that juxtapose segments (*nicht gerade, aber* … in Extract 7.3) This juxtaposition, in turn, illustrates how she experiences her competence in interaction, specifically her first encounters with Japanese speakers on her travels to Japan. We also detect a rhythmic composition of indexicals in the parallel structure that she creates in her narrative about workplace discourse. She talks about the iterative circles of drafting, checking, and revising messages on the company-internal group chat. People at the company adjust the politeness level by adding honorifics. This parallelism and repetition points to concrete moments and routines that she experiences at her workplace. It is a circle of reiteration, revisiting, and reflecting on written events. Rhythm emerges through structured repetition.

Carlo uses a parallel structure when listing three stereotypes that he faces in first-time encounters with Japanese people (four seasons, good Japanese, ability to use chopsticks in Extract 7.1). The rhythm that emerges here mirrors his temporal experience of ritualized interactional exchanges.

Nihongo ojoozu desu ne is also a repetition, spanning larger planes of enregisterment. While not a repetition of segments in the immediate co-text of the narrating event, it is an uptake and repetition that my interlocutors draw on as a resource to describe their experiences of being a migrant in Japan. Repetition and parallelism form rhythms that project onto larger units of social life (Lefebvre 2004, see also Chiba 2024). Rhythm is a patterned arrangement of sounds and silences in time (Auer et al. 1999). They emerge in sequences and may be further repatterned in sub-sequences. Rhythms represent the ups and downs during interactions at the workplace, the interchanging and code-switching of languages, such as English and Japanese, and register varieties, such as "normal" Japanese and *keigo*. There is the circular rhythm of coming back home, accompanied by occasional struggle on language choice—a struggle that forms a more constant arrhythmia throughout Takashi and Katharina's lives. In comparison, frequent switches between English and Japanese in Chen and Junya's private discourse creates a more synchronous rhythm (Extract 3.2). A rhythm can be detected in first-time encounters in which tropes of foreignness are "always the same," to

borrow Carlo's words. Rhythmic sequences thus reverberate societal stances toward migrant L2 users of Japanese.

8.3.6 Normalization

As I have shown, L2 users of Japanese achieve ordinariness (Sacks 1984) in their narratives. This discursive tactic works on a range of denotational explicitness. On the most explicit end, the adjective *normal* is used to describe communicative experiences. Nina wishes to use less verbose expressions in Japanese at her workplace to communicate in a "normal and simple way" (Extract 6.4). She distinguishes Japanese into a normal variety and *keigo* in her repertoire. Both are related, through color and location inside her head, but distinct languages that require different cognitive processing for her. Carlo frames his encounters with stereotypes as a routine, stereotypes are "normal." He expands on this description using expressions like "always" and "the same stuff" to present a *stance of ordinariness*.

Normalization, however, is also detectable with focus on more implicit contextualizations that narratively render experiences as ordinary. In this way, speakers "articulate practices as unremarkable and as conforming to norms" (Kroo 2022: 390). Chiara's phrase "you know how Japanese people are," followed by characterization of their practices (in this case, praising an L2 user's Japanese competence), presupposes shared knowledge about behavior that people associated with this category exhibit toward non-Japanese individuals. Nina uses a similar construction to characterize Japanese people's responses to L2 Japanese. It is presented as unremarkable due to its frequency and alignment with alleged stereotypical behavior.

These stances establish a frame of routine or ordinariness, aided by resources that index membership of a category. [80] Normalization interacts with epistemic stances and assumptions that take the normal for granted. Citing the discourse of and about good Japanese is an example, where compliments are normal for L2 users' of Japanese.

Experiences which evoked feelings of being treated as extra-ordinary (not being part, being different) by Japanese interlocutors are re-framed as ordinary interactions. Quotidian (re)framing (Matsumoto 2015b) allows a repositioning from being a marginalized L2 user of

[80] *Membership categorization analysis* (Sacks 1972) that emerged within the paradigm of conversation analysis, is one method to retrieve speakers' characterization practices. Categorizations are mundane and abundant in everyday talk.

Japanese, to someone who watches such behavior from above, thus rendering one's presented familiarity and knowledge with such practices as default. Quotidian framing relies on typification strategies that influence future communicative acts, since individuals "assume[] that knowledge which proved adequate up to the present will continue to do so in the future" (Heritage 1984b: 51). Experiences that are normal (compliments, switching to English, indirect requests in Japanese) become *routinized* and habituated. My interlocutors create alignment with personae and practices, as they expect Japanese people to behave in a certain way and so play their part as L2 user.

In a semiotic framework, what I call here normalization is part of *nomic calibration*, a discursive construction of patterns that exhibit a "'law'-like nature" (Silverstein 2021: 31). L2 users of Japanese reinforce or *authenticate* essentialist characterizations of Japanese communicative norms. Authentication is a discursive tactics which speakers employ to "activate these essentialist readings in the articulation of identity" (Bucholtz & Hall 2004: 386). To deem what is normal or ordinary, my interlocutors make use of *comparisons*.

8.3.7 Comparison

In all examples, comparison functions as a strategy to highlight differences in discourse, making it into a resource for engaging in ideological work. In order to make a comparison, signs must bear a perceivable contrast (see Gal & Irvine 2019: 17–18). Moreover, speakers need to establish comparative grounds onto which tokens can be compared (Kockelman 2016). Comparison is always scalar and perspectivized (Gal 2016: 92); items can be compared and contrasted on manifold levels. "When we *scale,* we orient, compare, connect, and position ourselves," as Carr & Lempert (2016a: 3, emphasis in original) observe. Below, I examine key discursive tactics in my data in which speakers construct comparative frameworks and position themselves contrastively.

One axis of comparison is *languages*—discrete, bounded, and named. Multilingual speakers may compare languages in their repertoire and what they (think they) can do with them. In my investigation, Japanese is constantly compared to other languages, mostly English and German). This reflects the linguistic biographies and repertoires of my interlocutors. Comparing Japanese with other languages, regardless of the actual features that are compared, allows for orientation. We can understand comparison in this sense as a (path)way marking. For example, Nina compares communicative practices in English and

Japanese. Requesting in Japanese consumes more time and is thus perceived as inefficient by her. Takashi and Katharina compare English, Japanese, and German throughout their conversation.

Speakers also compare people, one example is comparison between individuals with different degrees of rapport. Chiara compares responses to her Japanese by distinguishing her friends ("who don't tell her anything") from strangers or newly acquainted people. Speakers also compare themselves to others. Bruno compares himself to other exchange students. Takashi compares an English-speaking Katharina to a Japanese-speaking Katharina. Switching languages, he claims, is like encountering a different persona. Comparison is also salient when speakers characterize personae that are attached to labels of nationality, ethnicity, or citizenship. A comparison of how "Japanese" and "foreigners" communicate seems likely in the settings that I investigate. The comparison is preconditioned by my research design. Carlo, Chiara, and Nina all talk about "Japanese" people and what they do, such as rashly praising an L2 user's Japanese competence and acknowledging their efforts to learn the language.

8.3.8 Intensity, investment, commitment

As research on stancetaking and its components suggest (Kiesling 2020; Kockelman 2004), a speaker's investment and commitment to a display of their stance is crucial to understanding the stance's interactional effects. Intensity is calibrated through stress, intonation, repetitions, and explicit evaluative indexicals. For example, Carlo intensifies investment in his stance through the repetition of "i mean" with fast pace. Nina uses the German equivalent *ich mein* when reflecting on the fact that she has to master Japanese, because her colleagues do not really speak English. In her narratives of workplace interactions, Nina demonstrates high commitment to efficient workplace procedures through word stress and a variety of volume modulations. She evaluates the English version on her company's website. In her evaluation, the quality of the translation from Japanese is poor. A high-down intonational curve and high volume on "arm" ('poor') index a high investment to her stance. It also indexes a high commitment to the quality and outward presentation of the website to international English-speaking customers. Her emphasis on key indexicals like *time* and *polite* through lengthening also marks her investment.

When reflecting on the reasons behind language choices, Katharina shows varying degrees of investment. She mitigates her position that Takashi always switches to English by saying "sometimes," reducing epistemic commitment. In other examples, she intensifies investment in her stance through nonverbal gestures, when indicating that it is her who has to make a compromise in language choice when she switches to English. Investment also mirrors on broader scales (Darvin & Norton 2015), as prolonged allocation of resources in studying Japanese, for example. The relationship between momentary acts of stancetaking that rely on investment, and speakers' life investments becomes apparent here. These include, for example building a career in Japan, creating lasting relationships, and identification with local communities. What connects the scalarity of these concepts is *accountability*, the degree to which my interlocutors hold themselves and others accountable for events in their life as migrants in Japan.

8.3.9 Ascriptions of intentionality

A hallmark of lived experience of language—and competence across one's repertoire—is constant speculation about how others perceive one's language use (Rumsey 2013). In the case examples I present in the empirical chapters, the narrated interlocutors are often native speakers of Japanese, i.e., people who are perceived to be entitled to claim authority or legitimacy over language knowledge, workplace procedures, or Japanese culture. Competence is thus constructed with others' minds in mind (Rydell 2018).

In reflections on workplace communication, Nina ascribes intentions to her colleagues through inferential language. She marks stress on *erwartet* ('expect' in Extract 6.9), attributing behavioral expectations to them. She construes Japanese communication as requiring implicit understanding. This includes reading between the lines to discern 'what they really want.' She attributes a high cognitive demand—intention inference or mind-guessing—to Japanese discourse norms. In another example, she infers colleagues' intentions through their approach to customer service, positioning them as having different working styles and attributing to them a different, less anticipative work orientation. She also addresses intention inference when talking about her boss. She claims that even her Japanese colleagues sometimes cannot understand what he is telling them in Japanese (Extract 6.12). Through this reference, she established a narrated figure of her superior who has trouble communicating

in a transparent way to his subordinates. Intentionality may also serve as a semiotic tactic to exhibit resistance toward hierarchy.

In interviews about language choices, Takashi ascribes intentionality to Katharina's use of Japanese when she comes back home, explaining that "she wants to keep that Japanese brain." He also projects his own emotional responses, describing how speaking with her in Japanese makes her seem like a somewhat different person to him when she switches to Japanese. He essentializes languages as carriers of personality. Katharina counters by attributing his preference to his personal choice with "for you," emphasizing his agency and dominance in choosing English (see also Grosser 2025 for my earlier interpretations of their interactions).

L2 speakers attribute stereotypical intentionality to Japanese interlocutors and their communicative actions in encounters with L2 speakers. Carlo portrays Japanese people as naïve, surprised by non-natives who use Japanese or chopsticks. My interlocutors question and rationalize the assumed intentions behind the practice of complimenting L2 users, as they doubt the sincerity or authenticity of such compliments. This may reflect L2 users' display of modesty about their competences, a response fostered in L2 Japanese language socialization.

Stances in connection to intentionality that I examined in all examples rely on an interpersonal dimension (Kiesling 2022: 416–417). I share epistemic and experiential knowledge of the discourses my interlocutors narrate, which enables a jointly constructed emotional engagement with their experiences navigating Japanese spaces. My interlocutors assume this shared knowledge of experiences and can therefore draw on this resource in the interview. They use ascriptions of intentionality as resources to distribute accountability to narrated characters in order to rationalize their perceptions of competence.

8.4 Contexts and concerns: Negotiating multilingual lives

Having reviewed the stance resources, I now expand the view to suggest implications we can draw from metapragmatic stancetaking practices. Negotiating one's position as migrant and L2 users of Japanese is one concern of my interlocutors. I interpret their experiences in this thesis as window into a liminal threshold that oscillates between potential (I can do, I can become), and limitation or constraint (I can't do, I falter). Potential and limitation appear to be at the end of a continuum, but liminality fractally recurs on different scales and contexts;

from little choices in language (an interactional particle, a speech act, an honorific; see Ball 2004) in a millisecond, to choosing long-term investment over years (which languages to use in my everyday life with a partner, how do I navigate my multilingual workplace). The stances individuals take toward signs indexing competence, competent users, Japanese, foreigners, spouses, workers, are simultaneously *acts of identity* (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985) as they are *acts of alterity* (Hastings & Manning 2004).

8.4.1 The multilingual repertoire as a field of contestation

Each comparison of languages is laden with valorization and ideological weight. Perceptions of their resourcefulness within the societal Japanese reservoir shift. As I hope I could show in the empirical part, experiences of language go beyond Japanese as L2. Therefore, we need a *repertoire approach* to capture the multilingual experiences of speaking subjects more coherently (Busch 2012b, 2017, 2021 [2013]; Kramsch 2009).

Juggling between languages is implicitly made into an issue at several instances in my data. I showed that this is not an issue arising out of multilingualism per se. Instead, it is an issue of understanding, reflection, and interpersonal relationships. For example, language choice becomes contested in Katharina's and Takashi's relationship, but not because of multilingual options per se. Rather, they disagree about maintaining linguistic consistency, alignment, and mutual understanding. Katharina occasionally exerts authority on competence by teaching Takashi German, yet these moments are marginal to their overall language dynamics.

In Nina's case, bilingualism or multilingualism is made into an issue because of different pragmatic strategies in requests. The core issue is metapragmatic: In Nina's view, Japanese politeness requires longer and more indirect structures, while English allows direct and time-efficient exchanges. While complaining about burdensome Japanese politeness, she also criticizes her colleagues' English translations—a language in which she feels more competent. Multilingualism is often implicitly framed as a barrier to understanding (see Gottlieb 2011b for an overview). While Japanese society maintains a strong monolingual bias, it simultaneously expresses surprise and admiration when foreigners attempt to learn Japanese. Competence is a tactic to gain access to the Japanese communities, while native speaker biases try to keep outsiders out of this domain and reserve Japanese for Japanese people (Takeuchi 2023b).

The point here is not that L2 Japanese speakers lack proficiency or that a shared native language would solve communication problems. Instead, we need to shift our gaze toward treatment and valorization of linguistic repertoires, on the individual and the societal level. This gaze is particularly valuable as legal statuses and attitudes toward migration to Japan and L2 Japanese are becoming more gradient, conditional, and performance-based. In this view, migrants are framed instrumentally as a solution to labor and demographic problems, while keeping strong limitations on rights and long-term inclusion (Chiavacci 2025).

Language competence is thus often seen as a *skill* that neoliberal subjects need to acquire. As Urciuoli (2008: 213) writes "[s]kills themselves exist somewhat diffusely as entextualized techniques credited with the capacity to bring about measurable outcomes." And this is precisely why we need to be careful not to understand competence as a static measurable and easily assessable capacity that individuals possess, but rather a dynamic interactional, reflexive process of identifications and response to subjectivation. This does not mean that competence is not equally a *political* construct (Rydell et al. 2024). This political dimension mirrors the ideological frameworks that inform language policies (Länsisalmi 2025).

At the same time, a multilingual repertoire is a metapragmatic-reflexive asset that facilitates deeper contemplation of one's subject position as a migrant in Japanese society and the central role of language (see also Hori et al. 2025: 7 for an example). Before I explain more about the implications of contemplations, I highlight the relevance of emotions in understanding multilingual lives.

8.4.2 Emotions

Earlier in this thesis, I present a link between bodies and discourses (Section 3.2). This link becomes evident in narratives about emotional experiences. Approaching emotions as discursive and socially embedded phenomena (Wetherell 2012), I explored their relationship to competence and experiences as multilingual L2 speaker in Japan. In my investigation, speakers articulate, for example, embarrassment and frustration. These are oriented toward instances of using Japanese across different domains. Katharina expresses awkwardness or embarrassment when using Japanese with Takashi, which indexes less confidence in using Japanese in this specific interactional context. L2 speakers' reports on embarrassment when making mistakes in Japanese have also been observed by Iwasaki (2021b: 219). Rebecca (Extract 3.1 in the Theory Chapter) vividly describes how speaking Japanese may somatically

lead to flushing, maybe due to lack in confidence. This, however, is also a bodily reaction to subjectivation and discourses about L2 speakerhood.

In Chapter 7, I reported on moments where I received a *nihongo ojoozu desu ne*. In hindsight, I see myself in the awkward situation to find an appropriate response—while simultaneously processing an internal meta-metapragmatic discourse in puzzlement. While I was aware of the frequency of this enregistered routine, it still felt awkward for me when struggling to produce an immediate response.

Nina grows frustrated over time-consuming workplace routines. She describes Japanese as indirect and *keigo* as inefficient. Katharina is frustrated when her partner does not respond to her in Japanese. These emotions often lead to resignation. Feelings of resignation become normalized as an inevitable aspect of using L2 Japanese. Initial frustration with communicative asymmetries gives way to accepting these patterns as unchangeable within the interaction. If Takashi does not want to understand Katharina's Japanese, she has to switch to English. If Nina wants to be accepted as professional in Japanese workplace interactions, she has to use and refine her *keigo*. If L2 users of Japanese want to settle in Japan, they have to accept being asked questions related to their background as foreigners. They accept it, as the way things are in Japan. This positioning forms into a normalized experience. As I explained in Section 8.3.6, normalization is a tactic through which L2 speakers of Japanese present potentially discomforting experiences as quotidian events in order to position oneself as legitimate and knowing member of Japanese society.

On the other hand, my interlocutors also describe using language and being evaluated as a positive experience. English might sometimes be the easier and more comfortable choice, such as in the case of Katharina and Takashi. Nina reflects on the moments when she could communicate in Japanese as a tourist in the past. And Chiara's Japanese is acknowledged by her friends who don't see a difference to her. These examples indicate that emotions are experienced as gradient and context-dependent dimensions of competence across one's repertoire.

8.4.3 Agency and the internal conversation

Stepping back to examine these discursive fragments from a bird's-eye perspective, a central question emerges across all accounts of lived experience: how should I, as a migrant in Japan, act? What should I do? How should I respond? Action operates at multiple scales, ranging

from sequential organization of signs in interaction (Section 4.3.3), toward more encompassing questions about belonging and identity, e.g., sequences in routines and life. These questions, as I showed, hinge on the "problem of intersubjectivity" (Heritage 1984b: 54–61), how actors establish a shared frame of knowledge, understanding, and expressibility. I draw here on the concept of *agency*, as it is particularly useful to explore the relevance of metapragmatics for navigating life in Japan.

My empirical chapters reveal agency as fundamentally relational. Ahearn (2001: 112) describes agency as "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act." This captures how my interlocutors and I navigate structures that offer potential and limitation to act. Nina's critical stance toward *keigo* while converging to norms, my participants' interpretive reframing of stereotypical compliments, and Katharina's continuous attempts to speak Japanese despite English replies. However, this also accounts for me, and is reflected, for example, in the changes I made to my research design when facing entry restrictions to the field.

Yet agency in language is also something participants *deliberate about*—they pause, weigh options and choices, consider motivations and consequences. This is where Archer's *internal conversation* becomes analytically vital (Archer 2003). Nina's language portrait separating *normal* Japanese from *keigo* visualizes her internal deliberation about register management. Katharina's repeated explicit statements about language choice, followed by cycles of attempting and adjusting, show the internal conversation as ongoing, iterative, and bearing relational consequences. Within such conversations, we have seen that, for example, Carlo and Chiara frame linguistic experiences as quotidian encounters with the Japanese other. This framing also requires deliberation about prior encounters, moments, and experiences. These feed into anticipation of future interactions, and perhaps management or adjustment of behavior in some way (Neustupný 2005). This could include, for example, stepping over such comments. Deliberations about interactional experiences are examples of *residential agency* (Kockelman 2007), i.e., how speakers control and compose signs, for example, their reactions and responses. However, I argue here that we can only understand the consequences of exercised reflexivity—internal deliberations that are made explicit in discourse. These deliberations emerge as vacillations between *contexts and concerns* (Archer 2007: 145–157). Scalar contexts, comprising participation frameworks, genre, interactional histories, times and places, communities and societies stand in direct relation to individual, personal concerns about life. Such questions about agency may include: how much Japanese do I want to use in Japan? How much *keigo* is needed? Why just not using English, because it is more

convenient and time-efficient? Will there be times when I won't be treated as a foreigner, or non-native speaker of Japanese? Will my Japanese be perceived as good, but not explicitly evaluated?

The internal conversations echo into spaces where deliberation about linguistic practices is encouraged. In the interview context, speakers externalize their internal conversations to me. Two qualifications matter here with respect to Archer's work: first, agency is irreducibly intersubjective—the "internal" conversation is always populated with others' voices (Bakhtin) and anticipated responses. Second, agency is embodied and affective, not purely cognitive. Rebecca's nervousness when speaking Japanese, Nina's cadential experience of *keigo* production, Katharina's felt sense of constraint exemplify how deliberation is intertwined with emotional reactions toward interactional experiences (Busch 2021).

In synthesis, my findings suggest that my participants are neither simply constrained nor autonomous; they are reflective beings making meaning from circumstance (or contexts), testing those meanings against others' responses, and recursively adjusting understanding and action. In this way, agency also subsumes what Hübler & Bublitz (2007: 9) call *expressibility*, the ability to compose signs that instigate an interpretant forging out a response in resonance to the prior communicative acts (Du Bois 2014; Kockelman 2007). I will conclude considerations of agency when revisiting the domains in the last section of this chapter.

8.4.4 Interconnection of domains

While organizing the empirical parts loosely based on domains, the findings also show that all are interconnected. Language practices from professional contexts may also cross into private domains. For example, Katharina comes back home with Japanese from work, whereas Takashi comes back with English and refuses to switch into Japanese. At the same time, they also report that they use English to secure privacy in public spaces in Japan, as they assume that few Japanese understand enough English to overhear and understand their conversations. By doing so, they align with international personae that are perceived as distinct from Japanese mainstream. Yet the spatial segregation of languages—Japanese for work and English at home—means that their linguistic repertoires may not be fully integrated. Spatial segregation in discursive domains is incorporated into her linguistic experience.

The discourse of good Japanese exemplifies how public ideologies about competence, speakers, and language practices circulate and become sedimented. They manifest in sometimes transient encounters. My interlocutors report how newly acquainted Japanese individuals praise them for their ability to speak Japanese. This ritualized sequence of compliments is rooted in public discourse linking Japanese language competence to ethnicity and nationality (Heinrich 2012; Lee 2012 [1996]). It is an example of enregisterment that extends across the group of Japanese language learners. As I showed, this discourse is not about structured assessment of language competence, but about redefining boundaries of identity and alterity. Language here serves as vehicle for demarcations, and L2 users are aware of the indexical implications of this discursive routine.

The analysis has also revealed that certain domains of social life call for metapragmatic reflection on speech acts. The cases of requesting at the workplace and compliments about competence are examples that show how metapragmatic reflections emanate from tokens of speech acts. These tokens then form types of reflexive interpretations, i.e., enregisterment, that become resources reintegrated into the communicative repertoire.

The interconnecting domains provide anchors for newcomers navigating life in Japan, offering both stability and some flexibility for adaptation. In their pursuits, migrants also need to need to be recognized as individuals stepping out into the public in order to become or claim a status as a person. Arendt (2007 [1981]) formulates this process as *appearing* in public to make oneself and one's actions visible to others.[81] At the same time, it is a space to be heard, seen, and included, opening up potential to enact power (Arendt 2007 [1981]: 251). Learning and using a language allows access to public life. However, in the context of Japanese language education, the scope and nature of language competence required for accessing those spheres remain obscure (Fukumura 2024: 294-265).[82] At the same time, as I showed in the empirical parts, we should be careful to equate more resources, and "higher" competences with more autonomy, better access to more resources, or legitimate membership in domains of social life (Rosa 2016: 41). Competence emerges relationally

[81] Notice the presumably unintended but striking connection to the original formulation of stancetaking as "a public act" (Du Bois 2007: 163).

[82] Language educators in the Japanese context, however, make enthusiastic proposals. These proposal include anthropological engagements and critique of received ideologies of language education (Ohri & Sugihara 2025; Sato & Doerr 2014; Sato & Murata 2018), narrative approaches to language education (Kitade et al. 2021), or resilience and wellbeing as potentials of communication education (Murata 2022b).

across domains and is subject to unequal evaluations (see, for example, Park 2010; Rydell 2018). However, it is not an absolute precondition to access them or become a ratified participant in them. While limited in scope, this thesis might help shed some light on defined aspects of experiencing L2 speakerhood that appear in contemporary Japan.

9 Conclusion

9.1 Completing a chapter

What role does competence in Japanese and other languages play in migrants' everyday experiences in Japan? And how are aspects of competence mobilized and narrated in discursive interaction? I started off from these questions and explored answers to them across three different domains of social life. I looked at how couples choose and manage their languages for everyday communication. I explored what professionals think about honorific registers of Japanese at the workplace. And I traced how learners of Japanese respond to ambiguous reactions toward their Japanese. These questions seem rather disconnected at first, but share the same core: How do speakers perceive and construct their competence in Japanese and other languages across their repertoire?

I engaged with various individuals over the course of my fieldwork in Japan. They allowed me to walk a few steps along their path, offering insights into their everyday experiences. In these experiences, competence in and across languages becomes focus of an issue that they explicate in narrative discourse to me. In this final chapter, I briefly recapitulate my main findings (Section 9.2). Then, I give an overview of the implications of this research (Section 9.3). I add remarks on methods (Section 9.4). Then, I address some limitations (Section 9.5) and discuss possible avenues for future research (Section 9.6). I complete this chapter with my concluding remarks to this thesis in Section 9.7.

9.2 Main findings

This thesis demonstrates that L2 Japanese users' communicative competence in contemporary Japan is a dynamic, intersubjective process shaped by metapragmatic stancetaking and ideological work (e.g., native speaker bias), spanning relations across private, professional, and public domains. A repertoire approach is fruitful to showcase that in

multilingual configurations, competence emerges only across languages through relational practices and that *speaker legitimacy* is a central concern for all my interlocutors.

In the example of the multilingual couple (Chapter 5), English dominates over Japanese due to emotional discomfort (when it is experienced as *hazukashii* 'awkward'), mutual challenges in expressibility and understanding, spatiotemporal factors (e.g., privacy in public), and accreted stances favoring efficiency, despite efforts to sustain Japanese.

The workplace narratives (Chapter 6) reveal tensions in multilingual communicative routines: time-consuming honorific rhythms hinder efficiency versus direct English, with Nina mediating languages amid native speaker ideologies and unequal resource evaluation (e.g., the company's tendency to prioritize the Japanese website).

Public compliments, such as *nihongo joozu desu ne*, (Chapter 7) carve out difference in first-time encounters, to which speakers respond by normalizing this discourse and recycling and reframing stereotypes. Superficial compliments make the L2 users feel positioned as outsiders. Yet reframing the experiences as ordinary allows them to claim a status as legitimate participant in social life in contemporary Japan.

Lived experiences of competence in and across languages can be traced in narrative discourse through careful analysis of the linguistic resources that speakers employ to present their metapragmatic stances, among them suprasegmental features, citational practices, parallelism and rhythm, comparison, normalization, and ascriptions of intentionality.

Competence transcends grammar, emerging via reflexive loops of lived experience, stance accretion, and metapragmatic ascriptions. Through recourse to competence, L2 Japanese is at times illegitimized (Takeuchi 2023b). These insights urge reconceptualizing communicative competence beyond native norms for inclusive policies and education.

9.3 Implications

The findings of my thesis have several implications for our understanding of migration and L2 users in contemporary Japan. I argue that it is not language per se, but rather a person's perceived or ascribed competence in a language and use of registers that is subject to evaluation. Some strands of Japanese language education overemphasize formal registers (*keigo*) and structural accuracy, ignoring the emotional, embodied, and relational dimensions that speakers experience. For example, Nina's workplace narrative shows how time-consuming politeness conventions can impede communicative effectiveness. Rebecca places

Japanese on her cheeks to express blushing and nervousness when using it. This suggests curricula should balance cultural norms with pragmatic efficiency and considerations for emotions. Interlocutors and teachers should acknowledge the somatic responses, such as nervousness and embarrassment that L2 speakers encounter (Kramsch 2009).

With regard to migration policies, the findings reveal a complicated situation: Japan positions Japanese language competence as essential for integration, yet interactional practices often delegitimize L2 speakers. The government frames language learning as a tool for migrants to become productive workers, but workplace cultures operate on the basis of "native Japanese" logics. Also, the stereotypical compliment *your Japanese is good* functions as a marker of alterity rather than genuine recognition. This suggests policies should move beyond framing language proficiency as an individual responsibility and instead address structural and cultural barriers to speaker legitimacy. This is especially relevant in a growing multilingual society, where L2 speakers perform essential language mediation (for example, translations and interpretation in customer service) yet often lack formal recognition or elevated status (e.g., Heinrich 2025b). Such language work deserves explicit acknowledgment in job descriptions and compensation structures.

Katharina and Takashi's negotiation of English and Japanese reveals that language choice in close relationships indexes deeper questions of shared identity (couplehood), agency, and belonging. I showed that emotions like Katharina's embarrassment about using Japanese or frustration with diminished understanding drive choices more than rational calculation based on measurable proficiency in a language alone. This corroborates linguistic anthropologists' and sociolinguists' calls to include emotion and affect into a reconceptualization of communicative competence (Kataoka et al. 2013; Rydell 2018).

In essence, my findings highlight how language competence functions as a tool for reproducing social hierarchies and in/exclusion. Since Bourdieu (1991: 43–65) laid out the conceptual foundation for understanding the nexus of legitimacy, competence, and speakerhood, researchers have investigated how this process operates in Japanese society (Takeuchi 2023b). In this aspect, I can confirm Takeuchi's insights that L2 speakers of Japanese have to fight small everyday battles to gain legitimacy. The privileging of "native-like" competence and the subjectivation of L2 speakers as fundamentally different has consequences for employment, belonging, and rights. This connects to broader conversations

about citizenship, immigration, and the politics of multilingualism in an increasingly diverse Japan.[83]

9.4 Remarks on methodology

Throughout this thesis, the methodological choices I have made have not followed a linear blueprint, but rather evolved through iterative engagement with the field and with my interlocutors. Methodological rigor, when researching lived experience, consists not in adhering to a predetermined design, but in remaining attentive to what the data and the participants themselves reveal about their practices while the research unfolds. These moments, along with my own experience as an L2 speaker of Japanese, shaped which examples I selected in this study. As with any ethnographic project, prolonged time investment, multiple field visits, and sustaining rapport with my participants help solidify interpretations of situated discourse (Cole 2019).

Biographical and narrative interviews, aided by language portraits, yield revealing insights into L2 speakers' lived experiences of language. A repertoire approach makes it possible to reconstruct such lived experience, as has been shown by Iwasaki (2021b: 221) for the case of L2 Japanese users. Perceptions of the linguistic repertoire center on competence in and across languages. Thus, by dismantling this concept into some of its constitutive components, we can holistically explore pathways of language learning, not only for the Japanese context. Focusing on the *metapragmatics of competence* allows us to contextualize L2 users' positionings within discursive processes of subjectivation and legitimation. Competence is what speakers discursively produce (see also Carr 2010). Therefore, it requires a meta-level approach. For this purpose, Wortham & Reyes' (2021) model for discourse analysis that considers speech events over spatiotemporal scales has proven useful. It allowed for investigating how presentation of lived experiences emerges in iterative positionings. I tried to trace this iterativity when revisiting my participants in follow-up interviews and playback sessions. This adds a meta-layer to existing, interdiscursive conceptions of the notion of competence. This approach highlights the importance of investigating metapragmatic practices across temporal and spatial scales (Park 2021a; Spitzmüller 2022a).

[83] Some research with regard to citizenship has already been conducted and compiled in the edited volume by Gottlieb (2011a).

With these scales, we can maintain a broad view on pathways of socialization and identifications, for example, as a couple, professional worker, or exchange student in Japan while investigating minute interactions in seconds in detail. These scales cross different places, like a private home, public places such as cafés and stores, and even offices, albeit in a mediated sense.

9.5 Limitations

This research has focused primarily on retrospective accounts and interview discourse rather than on extensive recordings of workplace or public interactions. While narrative interviews provide valuable access to subjective experience and metapragmatic awareness, they do not capture the full complexity of in-the-moment interaction. For example, I could not capture exactly what is happening in Katharina and Takashi's everyday language choices or how Nina uses honorifics at her workplace.

The participant pool is also limited, due to availability and the speaker-centered approach adopted in this thesis. Most focal participants are European, educated, and engaged in white-collar professional work. This shapes experiences of subjectivation, access to particular labor markets, and positioning in Japanese society in ways that differ from L2 users with other backgrounds (see also Debnár 2016). This pool also reflects the contours of my personal networks and trajectory. My own positioning as a researcher inevitably shaped the research process. As a European L2 user of Japanese who has spent extended periods in Japan, I occupy a social position similar to that of the many people I encountered during fieldwork. This similarity facilitated rapport and alignment but may have created blind spots. Experiences that seemed normal or unremarkable to my participants and me might have warranted more critical examination. My investment in particular theoretical frameworks (lived experience, stance, and competence viewed from a metapragmatic angle) shaped which aspects of the data I foregrounded in analysis.

Reflexivity with respect to epistemological perspectivity means attending to how my own experiences, assumptions, and positionality influenced what I noticed, how I interpreted it, and what I chose to emphasize in the written analysis (see also Section 4.3.4 in the Methods Chapter). Throughout the research process, I attempted to remain attentive to moments of surprise, disconfirmation, or tension. For example, in some instances, my participants' experiences diverged from my expectations. I initially assumed that moments in which

Japanese competence is evaluated would lead to stronger feelings of being an outsider. In other instances, some of my interpretations felt uncertain. Revisiting my participants in follow-up sessions helped gain a deeper or more nuanced insight into their experiences. These moments often proved most generative for theoretical development. Nevertheless, interpretive limits inevitably remain. These shortcomings may stem from limited understanding, for example, limits of awareness (Silverstein 2001) or limits of thematization (Zuckerman & Enfield 2023).

9.6 Suggestions for future research

Future research should robustly integrate narrative-biographical-creative methods for investigating lived experiences and repertoires with rigorous linguistic discourse analysis. Applied linguists show sustained interest in how individuals assemble different resources in their repertoire but often fail to analyze *how* they narrate this process. I hold that discourse analysis in the tradition of interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz 1982, 1999; Rampton 2017), positioning theory (Bamberg 1997), or linguistic anthropology (Wortham & Reyes 2021) enables critical interventions.

In research on ideologies of communication in the Japanese context, scholars have hitherto concentrated on stances toward Japanese-internal variation and learning of other languages, such as English (see also the overview in Grosser et al. 2025). I suggest a more holistic view, an integrated perspective on the repertoire of L2 users of Japanese for future investigations. Narratives about the linguistic repertoire are a site where ideologies are at work. We need to further investigate the relations between resources or languages within and across repertoires. One avenue would be comparing how speakers metapragmatically construe speech acts, for example, requests in Japanese versus English or other languages. A method to investigate this is a speaker-centered approach based on interviews.

Future research could also benefit from workplace ethnographies that include more extensive observation and recording of multilingual communication in institutional settings, as has been done by Moody (2014, 2018, 2019a, 2019b). More ethnographic research on multilingual communication in corporations remains essential (Fairbrother 2015a).

Furthermore, we need to dedicate more research to uncovering the connections between (ascriptions of) intentionality and citational practices in the context of biographic-narrative interviews. While researchers have reported on such discourse strategies for other contexts

(e.g., De Fina 2003: 93–138 for Mexican migrants in the US), a perspective on migrants in Japan certainly contributes to our understandings of agency. Citational practices are, of course, only one facet of agency. Studying its discursive encoding is a novel way to explore how migrants in Japan experience agency, particularly in a society with a rapidly changing demography and perduring reservations about immigration. We need to find out what the social, economic, interactional factors are that enable, constrain, or channel individuals' actions.

Intentionality offers promising insights into understanding how issues of competence are negotiated in society. I would even go as far as saying that we need a renewed focus on intentionality and how intentions are discursively inferred in interaction if we want to stay faithful to the fundamental tenants of interactional sociolinguistics: i.e., to understand communicative practices and how speakers make sense of these practices (Gumperz 1999: 454).

9.7 Concluding remarks

This investigation has shown that being an L2 user of Japanese involves navigating relations of difference and establishing an identity within Japanese society. I portrayed the perspective of mostly European, educated individuals. This includes efforts to find one's place in communities and gain recognition as a legitimate member. At the same time, the individuals I presented here want to maintain an identity as an individual distinct from those socialized in Japan. While knowledge of Japanese contributes to belonging, the relationship between affiliation with communities and language is more complex. Multilinguals deliberate, compare, and balance languages in their repertoire. They also might consider more than functional utility when deliberating their competence, for example, including their emotional connections to certain resources.

Aspects of competence in and across languages are mobilized in discourse. Competence demands ongoing monitoring and recalibration, as it is a resource for organizing identities and alterities in social areas. Such mobilization is often explicit, directly addressed in discourse. However, competence can also operate implicitly. This means that we have to listen to L2 users of Japanese when they speak of competence. The title—*speaking of competence*—gestures toward this double sense: situated language use (pragmatics) and reflections on language (metapragmatics). Speaking competently and speaking about competence are

intertwined practices. First, speaking of competence involves saying something *about* competence. This involves how individuals articulate their understanding and expressibility, management of choices about registers and languages, and critical evaluations of interactional routines. Second, "speaking of" redirects attention to something recently mentioned or contextually salient (in the sense of *à propos*). This second meaning captures the elusive nature of perceptions of competence. These perceptions become relevant in interactional moments and in the flow of daily life. Competence is present across communicative moves, yet it is perceptible on varying scales of awareness of speakers. Such apparitions of competence across the repertoire may appear transparent, even graspable ("you don't understand me") or rather opaque, adumbrated through contours ("ah, you can use chopsticks").

The interlocutors in this study navigate daily life through Japanese, English, German, and other linguistic resources. They also continuously reflect on their experiences, building stances, taking positions, and making sense of their place in Japanese society through metapragmatic discourse. This thesis attends to both dimensions of speaking of competence. It demonstrates how lived experience and metapragmatic reflection co-constitute L2 user subjectivity in contemporary Japan.

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Appendix

A – Transliteration and Transcription

Transliteration Conventions

To transliterate Japanese text into Roman letters (*romaji*), I adopt the Hepburn system for names (if not otherwise transliterated by the author themselves) and established (socio)linguistic concepts, such as 敬語 *keigo* (a register of honorifics) or 共生 *kyōsei* ('conviviality'). City names, such as Tokyo and Osaka, are used according to their English spelling, without any diacritics denoting length of vowels. I also use the Hepburn system for transliteration of titles and authors' names in the bibliography.

In *transcripts* of spoken Japanese discourse (see the conventions below), I adopt a phonetic approach that attempts to capture the realization more accurately. This includes indication of phonologically distinctive long vowels as double consonants, and context-dependent devocalization of /i/ and /u/ in particular.

Romanization in Transcripts

Long vowels	⟨aa, ee, ii, oo, uu⟩ Contrary to common realization of ⟨ei⟩ as [e̞ː] in Standard Japanese, which thus yields transliteration of ⟨ee⟩ such as in *eego* ('English'), I keep transliteration of 敬語 as ⟨keigo⟩ with ⟨ei⟩ in all examples to keep it consistent with the more common spelling in sociolinguistic literature.
Devocalization	⟨i̥, u̥⟩ as in *wakarimashi̥ta* 'I understood' and *desu̥* 'to be'

Transcription and Typographic Conventions

The transcription of audio data follows the system devised by Sacks et al. (1974), with some additions from the *Gesprächsanalytisches Transkriptionssystem* ('conversation analytic transcription system,' abbreviated as GAT) by Selting et al. (2009). My notation of *voice registers* of phonation and articulation types and is based on Sicoli (2015 [2001]). Transcripts are set in Calibri to typographically distinguish them from the main text. Within the main text, however, I keep Cochineal for typographic consistency. I indicate quotes from transcripts in the main texts either in "double quotation marks" if the original segment is in English, or in *italics* if the original is either in German or Japanese. 'Single quotation marks' are used for translations into English (from either German or Japanese) or quotations inside quotations. Translations in transcripts are in *italics* either placed below or to the right next to the source text. Double quotation marks are also used for "scare quotes" that question the quoted element.

Basic intonation, breath, and transcriber's meta-comments

.	low fall
,	slightly rising, continuing (level of intonational unit)
?	rising (question) (level of intonational unit)
!	exclamation
wo:rd	lengthening
<u>stress</u>	stressed segment, emphasis (on lexeme or particle)
<u>yo:</u>	rising stress (on lexeme or particle)
<u>ka</u>juaru	falling stress (on lexeme or particle)
hh	perceivable outbreath
.hh	perceivable inbreath
.HH	loud inbreath
( )	unintelligible
(word)	imputed wording
((moves hand))	description of a speaker's paraverbal bodily behavior
((sound of car))	description of non-human sounds hearable in the recording

Amplitude and pace

° °	softer than surrounding talk (*piano*)
°° °°	extra-soft (*pianissimo*)
! !	louder than surrounding talk (forte)
cres! !	becoming louder (*crescendo*)
dim° °	starting from default pace becoming softer (*diminuendo*)
> <	faster than surrounding talk (*allegro*)
>> <<	extra-fast segment
< >	slower than surrounding talk (*lento*)
<< >>	extra-slow segment
acc> <	becoming faster (*accelerando*)
ral< >	becoming slower (*rallentando*)
dim/acc	combined articulation (extends from start of the line to the end)

Phonation, voice registers, and articulation

$ $	smiling while uttering the bracketed segment
@ @	laughing while uttering the bracketed segment
↑	high pitch
↓	low pitch
↑ ↓	rising-falling intonational contour
→	high continuing pitch
→ ←	slowly falling pitch over the articulation of the segment
~ ~	creaky voice
% %	whisper voice
((laughing))	laughing
p^{h}erson	strong aspiration indicated with ^{h}

Turn construction

wor-	abrupt rephrasing
(.)	short pause
((1,2))	pause in seconds and milliseconds
word=word	latching between intonation phrases
turn= =turn	latching of turns
[overlap [overlap	starting overlap of turns
over[lap] [over]lap	exact bracketing of overlap across turns

B – Information Sheets and Consent Forms

Recordings

University of Vienna
Department of Linguistics
Sensengasse 3a, 1090 Vienna, Austria
https://linguistik.univie.ac.at/en/

Project title: *Metapragmatic Stancetaking in Interactions of L1 and L2 Users of Japanese*
Researcher: Florian GROSSER
E-Mail: grosser@ Phone: +81…

INFORMATION SHEET AND DECLARATION OF CONSENT

Recordings

1. Description and purpose of the project

My name is Florian GROSSER. I am a doctoral student in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Vienna in Austria and a visiting research fellow at Waseda University. I am conducting research for my dissertation. The purpose of this project is to investigate conversations between users of Japanese with different cultural backgrounds and what they think about language. I kindly ask you to participate in this project.
I would like you to

1) agree to regularly record your conversations for me

2. Instructions and Time Involvement for Audio Recordings

- Please **record your conversations with your partner, a friend or a group of friends** over several weeks. The people you talk to may change in every recording. You can freely choose to
  - do **audio** recordings with your smartphone, or
  - do **video** recordings (via Skype, ZOOM, Microsoft Teams, etc.), or both.
- If you need a **recording device**, I can provide you with one.
- You can choose **where** and **when** to record the conversations, for example, on the campus, at a café / restaurant, or at home.
- You may record several times a week or once per week, depending on how much time you have.
- You can record as long as you want. You can talk about any topic.
- You can continue to make recordings as long as you wish.
- But please do not record a conversation with someone who is not aware of being recorded. Make sure that **all of the participants in the conversation** give their consent to be recorded.

Please send the recordings to me:

- E-Mail: grosser@
- LINE-ID:

Please provide the following data for each participant in the conversation

- Name (pseudonyms are acceptable)
- Age (range is fine)
- Occupation
- Nationality
- Mother tongue(s) / native language(s)
- Other languages or dialects you can speak
- Location of the recording

University of Vienna
Department of Linguistics
Sensengasse 3a, 1090 Vienna, Austria
https://linguistik.univie.ac.at/en/

3. Risks & Benefits

There are **no direct benefits or risks** to you. You will not incur any costs from participating in this study. By participating in this project, you have the chance to further our understanding of the mechanisms of intercultural communication in Japan.

4. Treatment of Data & Confidentiality

I will listen to and partly transcribe and analyze the recordings. All names will be substituted by **pseudonyms** (fake names). Any parts which may identify one of the participants will be erased and will therefore not be transcribed. The recordings are only accessible to me. Parts of the transcripts will be used for my doctoral dissertation and academic publications. The data are treated in accordance with the EU law *General Data Protection Regulation*.

5. Data Storage

Your personal data and the recordings will be kept at a secure location and protected with a password. They will be erased after this research project is finished.

6. Your Rights

You may choose at any time to **withdraw your consent** to participate in this project by informing me. You do not need to give a reason for your withdrawal. After informing me, I will erase all recordings and data you have provided me.

- You can indicate parts of your recordings and the transcripts which you want to be deleted.
- You have the right to inquire about the treatment of your data.
- If you have any questions you can contact me at any time.

7. Declaration of Consent

I hereby confirm that I have been satisfactorily informed about the contents of the project and my rights as a participant I am aware that I can withdraw my consent at any time. I am aware that parts of the data I provide will be used in academic publications. By signing this form, I indicate that I understand the conditions of participating in this research and how my data is treated.

	Yes	**No**
I consent to make audio/video recordings	☐	☐

Your Name (print): _____

Your Signature: _____ Place & Date: _____

Interviews

University of Vienna
Department of Linguistics
Sensengasse 3a, 1090 Vienna, Austria
https://linguistik.univie.ac.at/en/

Project title: *Speaking of competence: Lived experiences of language in Japan*
Researcher: Florian Grosser
E-Mail: florian.grosser@univie.ac.at Phone: +43…

INFORMATION SHEET AND DECLARATION OF CONSENT

Interview

1. Description and purpose of the project

My name is Floriann Grosser. I am a doctoral student in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Vienna in Austria. I am conducting research for my dissertation. The purpose of this project is to investigate experiences of Japanese users with different cultural backgrounds and what they think about language. As part of this project, I collect language portraits and conduct interviews. I kindly ask you to participate in my study.
I would like you to

1) agree to be interviewed by me
2) agree to prepare a language portrait for me

2. Interview

I would like to conduct an **interview with you for about 1 hour**. I would like to ask you questions about your languages and ways of communicating. With your permission, I would like to **record** the interview.

3. Language Portrait

I would like to ask you again to use the supplied body silhouette and indicate the different languages, dialects, and ways of speaking which are a part of you with different colors.

4. Risks & Benefits

There are **no direct benefits or risks** to you. You will not incur any costs from participating in this study. By participating in this project, you have the chance to further our understanding of ideas about language.

5. Treatment of Data & Confidentiality

I will listen to and partly transcribe to the recorded interview. You can choose a **pseudonym** (fake name). Any parts which may identify one of the participants will be erased and will therefore not be transcribed. The recordings are only accessible to me. Parts of the transcripts and the body silhouette will be used for my doctoral dissertation and academic publications. The data are treated in accordance with the EU law *General Data Protection Regulation*.

6. Data Storage

Your personal data and the recordings will be kept at a secure location and protected with a password. They will be erased after this research project is finished.

7. Your Rights

You may choose at any time to **withdraw your consent** to participate in this project by informing me. You do not need to give a reason for your withdrawal. After informing me, I will erase all recordings and data you have provided me.

- You can indicate parts of your recordings and the transcripts which you want to be deleted.
- You have the right to inquire about the treatment of your data.
- If you have any questions you can contact me at any time.

8. Declaration of Consent

I hereby confirm that I have been satisfactorily informed about the contents of the project and my rights as a participant I am aware that I can withdraw my consent at any time. I am aware that parts of the data I provide will be used in academic publications. By signing this form, I indicate that I understand the conditions of participating in this research and how my data is treated.

	Yes	**No**
I consent to being recorded during the interview	□	□
I consent to provide a language portrait	□	□

Your Name (print): _____

Your Signature: _____ Place & Date: _____

Japanese Request Forms for Interviews (*Kikitori chōsa iraisho*)

2022 年 09 月 XX 日
依頼者：ウィーン大学言語学研究科博士課程院生
早稲田大学・日本学術振興会外国人特別研究員（欧米短期）
Florian Grosser

聞き取り調査依頼書

日本語母語話者・非母語話者の言語意識と言語使用について明らかにするため聞き取り調査（インタビュー）とランゲージ・ポートレートの作成を依頼する。また、家庭内における言語使用や相互行為を参与観察する。インタビューの謝礼として、調査研究費（外国人特別研究員・欧米短期）から一人につき 2000 円の図書カードを渡す。

インタビュー対象者：FIRST NAME SURNAME,　FIRST NAME SURNAME
日時：2022 年 9 月 XX 日、昼から夕方
場所：FIRST NAME と FIRST NAME の家（大阪市）
目的：日本語や他の言語の学習過程、家庭内の相互行為における言語に対する意識を明らかにするためインタビューを依頼する。
謝礼： 2000 円（図書カード）×2（計 4000 円）

Japanese Interview Content Report (*Kikitori chōsa naiyō hōkokusho*)

2022 年 09 月 XX 日
依頼者：ウィーン大学言語学研究科博士課程院生
早稲田大学・日本学術振興会外国人特別研究員（欧米短期）
Florian Grosser

聞き取り調査内容報告書

本聞き取り調査は、日本語母語話者・非母語話者の言語意識と家庭内の言語使用について明らかにするため聞き取り調査（インタビュー）と参与観察を実施した。インタビューの対象者と要領は以下の通りである。

インタビュー対象者：FIRST NAME SURNAME,　FIRST NAME SURNAME
日時：2022 年 9 月 XX 日、昼から夕方
場所：FIRST NAME と FIRST NAME の家（大阪市）

インタビューと参与観察は音声のみ録音した。録音データをもとにテキストの書き起こし、質的分析を行う。参与観察の時、気づきや印象はノートに記入した。インタビュー後は観察したことを振り替え、フィールド・ノートに記入した。
インタビューでは、相互行為における言語意識と言語使用を明からにすることを目的とし主に以下の点について質問を用意した：

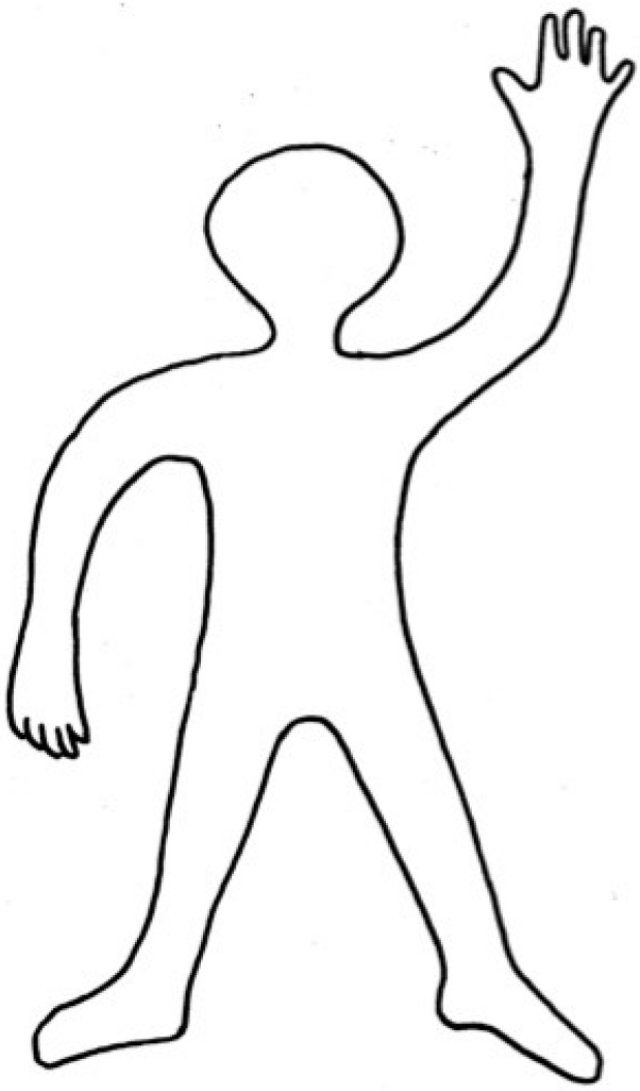
- 自分が今まで学習した言語とその言語に対しての意識について（ランゲージ・ポートレート）
- 日常的なコミュニケーションについて
- 日本社会に対する帰属意識について

ランゲージ・ポートレートに基づき、言語意識と家庭内における言語使用について聞き出した。

C – Language Portraits and Story Prompt

Example of a body silhouette

Taken from https://heteroglossia.net/Sprachportraet.123.0.html



Explanation of the language portrait activity

This is a body silhouette.
Imagine this body silhouette to be your **own body**.

1. Think about all the **languages**, **dialects**, and **ways of speaking** that are part of you. Which languages/dialects can you speak? Which did you learn in the past? Are there languages you want to learn?
   You can also include programming languages and other forms of communication (e.g., writing).

2. Make a list of all these languages.

3. Assign a color to each language. When you think of a language, which color would you use to represent this language?

4. Draw on the body silhouette. Where would you locate your languages on your body? Where do you feel a connection to this language?

Example of the story prompt

Think of an episode in which you used Japanese with someone. Is there an episode in which you felt uncomfortable or insecure using the language? Pick one scene that you remember. Can you describe this scene? Try to describe it as precise (and vivid) as possible. You can include sensory dimensions of the experience. Was there any sound, scent, taste, visual impression that you remember? Try to include answers to the “Wh-questions” (Where was it? When was this situation? Who was involved? In which context? What has happened?)

Looking back at this episode, how do you feel? Has anything changed after that (your actions, attitude, etc.)?

D – Abstracts

Abstract in English

This thesis investigates *lived experiences of competence in and across languages* among L2 users of Japanese residing in contemporary Japan. Drawing on the concepts of lived experience, stance, metapragmatics, and competence, it examines how migrants perceive and negotiate their communicative practices across private, professional, and public domains. It offers a reformulation of the concept of communicative competence that goes beyond a person's repertoire, being influenced by ideologies, interaction, and ascriptions of intentionality.

Employing an ethnographic and speaker-centered approach, the study analyzes discourse data from audio recordings, interviews, language portraits, and fieldwork observations collected during several fieldtrips to Japan (2022–2025). I present three key cases. First, language negotiations of an Austrian-Japanese couple (Chapter 5), in which language choice between English and Japanese is problematized. Second, reflections on the encoding of honorific requests in workplace narratives of a German professional working at a Japanese company (Chapter 6). In this case, the speaker highlights differences between Japanese and English discourse and its efficiency. Third, I present L2 users' interpretations of the infamous *nihongo ojoozu desu ne* ('your Japanese is good') (Chapter 7). This example shows how compliments can operate as means to maintain boundaries, positioning L2 users as essentially different from Japanese.

The findings reveal that perceptions of competence function as ideological moorings that ground native speaker ideologies, expectations of registers, and questions of speaker legitimacy. In all cases, migrants are concerned with how others perceive their Japanese and afford their speculations in their rationalizations of communicative practices.

L2 users mobilize various resources in stancetaking, such as voicing, citational practices, comparisons, and rhythmic parallelism, to navigate alterity, belonging, and legitimacy in Japan. The findings underscore that we need to closely examine *how* speakers take stance in narratives in order to understand *what* they tell us about their experiences.

Ultimately, speaking of competence emerges as dynamic negotiation of multilingual lives. It challenges monolingual biases and a focus on competence as a normative accuracy, thereby enriching our understanding of speaker legitimacy in Japan.

Abstract in German

Diese Dissertation untersucht die gelebten Erfahrungen sprachübergreifender kommunikativer Kompetenz bei L2-Nutzer:innen des Japanischen im gegenwärtigen Japan. Auf der Grundlage soziolinguistischer Konzepte wie Spracherleben, Stancetaking, Metapragmatik und Kompetenz analysiert sie, wie Migrant:innen ihre kommunikativen Praktiken in privaten, beruflichen und öffentlichen Bereichen wahrnehmen und aushandeln. Die Arbeit entwickelt dabei einen reformulierten Kompetenzbegriff, der über das individuelle Repertoire hinausgeht und durch Ideologien, Interaktionen sowie Intentionalitätszuschreibungen geprägt ist.

Methodisch verfolgt die Studie einen ethnografischen und sprecher:innenzentrierten Ansatz. Analysiert werden Diskursdaten aus Audioaufnahmen, Interviews, Sprachenporträts und Feldbeobachtungen, die im Rahmen mehrerer Feldforschungsaufenthalte in Japan zwischen 2022 und 2025 erhoben wurden. Im Mittelpunkt stehen drei Fallstudien: erstens die Sprachverhandlungen eines österreichisch-japanischen Paares (Kapitel 5), anhand derer die Wahl zwischen Englisch und Japanisch im häuslichen Alltag untersucht wird; zweitens die Reflexionen einer deutschen Angestellten in einem japanischen Unternehmen über *Keigo* und sprachliche Höflichkeit im Arbeitskontext (Kapitel 6), wobei unterschiedliche Vorstellungen von Effizienz im Japanischen und Englischen herausgearbeitet werden; drittens die Interpretation der weithin bekannten Äußerung *nihongo ojoozu desu ne* („Ihr Japanisch ist gut") (Kapitel 7). Es wird gezeigt, dass diese Äußerung der Aufrechterhaltung sozialer Grenzen dient und Nicht-Muttersprachler:innen als grundlegend anders positioniert.

Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass kommunikative Kompetenz ideologisch verankert ist und dabei Native-Speaker-Ideologien, Registererwartungen und Fragen der sprachlichen Legitimität (re-)produziert. In allen Fällen reflektieren Migrant:innen, wie ihr Japanisch von anderen wahrgenommen wird, und beziehen solche Zuschreibungen in ihre Deutungen kommunikativer Praktiken in Interviews mit dem Forscher ein. Dabei nutzen L2-Nutzer:innen vielfältige kommunikative Ressourcen für narrative Positionierungen, darunter prosodische Modulation, Rhythmus, Zitationspraktiken, Vergleiche und Parallelismen, um Alterität, Zugehörigkeit und Legitimität in Japan narrativ zu verhandeln. Die Befunde machen deutlich, dass eine genaue Analyse der sprachlichen Formen erforderlich ist, um zu verstehen, wie L2-Sprecher:innen ihre gelebten Erfahrungen über verschiedene soziale Bereiche hinweg deuten.

Abstract in Japanese

本論文は、現代日本在住の日本語 L2 使用者における、言語内および言語間におけるコミュニケーション能力について考察するものである。生きた経験、スタンス、メタ語用、能力の概念に基づき、移住者が私的・職業的・公的領域において自らのコミュニケーション実践をいかに認識し、交渉しているのかを検討する。さらに、コミュニケーション能力を個人のレパートリーに還元されるものとしてではなく、イデオロギー、相互行為、他者への意図帰属の影響のもとで立ち現れるものとして捉え直す。

本研究は民族誌的かつ話者中心のアプローチを採用し、2022–2025 年にかけて日本で実施したフィールドワークで収集した音声記録、インタビュー、言語ポートレート、観察データを分析対象とする。以下の 3 つの事例を取り上げる。第 1 に、オーストリアと日本の国際カップルの言語交渉（第 5 章）をとりあげ、英語と日本語の家庭内の言語選択の過程を分析する。第 2 に、日本企業に勤務するドイツ人従業員の語りに見られる敬語使用と、職場コミュニケーションにおける依頼表現（第 6 章）に焦点を当て、日本語と英語のディスコースの効率性の捉え方の違いを証明する。第 3 に、「日本語、お上手ですね」というほめことばとそれに対する L2 使用者の解釈（第 7 章）を取り上げる。分析の結果、こうしたほめことばは境界維持の手段として機能し、L2 使用者が日本人との相互行為において本質的に異なる位置に置かれることが示される。

研究結果は、能力がイデオロギー的基盤として機能しており、とりわけネイティブスピーカー・イデオロギー、レジスタ使用、話者の正当性が、現代日本における L2 使用者の言語意識に強い影響を与えていることを示唆する。いずれの事例においても、移住者は他者の日本語評価を内面化し、それを自らのコミュニケーション実践を語る際にも反映させている。

L2 使用者は、韻律、引用、比較、並行構造などのスタンステーキングの資源を用いながら、日本での生活における他者性、帰属意識、正当性を認識し、交渉している。本研究は、移住者の語りに立ち現れる能力の経験を捉えるためには、語りの内容のみならず、言語について語る際に用いられる形式それ自体をメタ語用的に精査することが不可欠であることを示している。