

The Nonunitary Identities of Japanese Women

The Conceptualization of Selves Through Implications of 'Investment' in English Language Learning

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Abstract. This paper discusses the development of Japanese women's identities in the context of the accomplishment of agency in the field of foreign language study. In order to situate the identity within the feminist poststructuralist theory and SLA (second language learning) practice, the paper addresses Chris Weedon's and Bonny Norton's reconceptualizations of subjectivity as nonunitary. By doing so, the subjectivity is further analyzed in relation to the learners' 'investment' in learning a foreign language, to explain the very process of subject formation. Through the analysis of the interviews with young and financially accomplished Japanese women, it can be understood that their subjectivities appear to be regulated by their commitment and desire for the English language and not solely Occidental longings. Therefore, this paper tries to pinpoint the trajectory of transnational Japanese women's identity development and answer the question of what SLA situations and implications cause their identities to be interpreted in the context of struggle, or contestation.

Keywords: Identity, subjectivity, subject in process, SLA, Japanese women, Kristeva, and Foucault.

Introduction

Drawing on Bonny Norton's problematization of identity vis-à-vis SLA (second language learning) context, this paper will discuss the formative characteristics of identity in the context of Japanese women's accomplishment of subjectivity in the field of foreign language study. To be more specific, the question of identity in fluctuation is intriguing concerning Japanese women's identity development within the ideological discourse of internationalization (policies that presuppose "that English is the remedy for all international and global matters" (Nonaka, 2018, pp. Kindle Locations 211-212)) and their eventual subjectification to desire to learn a foreign language, i.e., the desire for internationalization. Based on the logic of identity as already socio-historically embedded in the discourse, we can problematize the desire in the same manner. Therefore, to understand Japanese women's desire to learn English, this paper will reflect on the poststructuralist theories of identity posited by Bonny Norton and Chris Weedon, to rethink the conceptualizations of subject and subjectivity in the discourse of SLA practice. These theories will be further applied to the data obtained through the interviews conducted with Japanese women and will be addressed from three different perspectives (in agreement with Norton) to, potentially, trace the identity change and development through these women's lived experiences.

The existing research on SLA and Language and Desire positioned Japanese women in, somewhat, unfavorable discursive position of erotically inspired Occidentals who perceive the West, and all it entails, as an idealistic geo-social

space that promises a better life than the one in Japan (Kelsky, 2001; Piller & Takahashi, 2006). Hence, to pinpoint a change in the discourse of Occidentalism and address the new perception of Japanese women's subjectivity as 'in process,' to use Kristevan concept (1984), the reconsideration of the existing research is required. That means it is essential to understand subjectivity¹ as a heterogeneous entity, or a site of struggle, that emerges in the diversity of social sites regulated by the power relations in "which the person takes up different subject positions" (Norton, 2013, p. 164).

Therefore, Norton's concept of investment, which encompasses the complexity of the relationship between learner's identity and her/his commitment to learning a language (2013, p. 3), applies to the dualistic relationship between Japanese women's subjectivities in process and the desire to learn a foreign language, English in this case. Thus, through the analysis of Japanese women's investment in the SLA practices, this paper tries to pinpoint the trajectory of transnational Japanese women's identity development and answer the question of what SLA situations and implications cause their identities to be interpreted in the context of struggle, or contestation.

The research data for this paper were collected in the period between November 2018 and January 2020. I generated the data from the semi-structured, both Skype and in-person interviews, conducted with young and financially accomplished Japanese women. For this paper, the interviews with five of them, Aya (27), Hazuki (27), Tomi (37), Michina (36), and Saki (32), will be analyzed. The interviews with these five participants are chosen for two reasons. If we reflect on the construct of investment as relevant in the establishment of the trajectory of the paper argumentation, these women can be considered representative examples because they either committed a significant amount of time to English language study (outside Japan) or are currently residing abroad and working on the fulfillment of their internationalist goals. Based on the data analyzed, my epistemological position is that Japanese women's identities can be interpreted as unfixed or in process. These fluctuating identities can be indicative of the potential sites of contradiction and duality on the liminal space of the transnational route between Japan, the USA, and Canada.

This paper is organized as follows: the next section discusses the theoretical framework of the study of identity and subjectivity by bringing up the theories posited by Michel Foucault and Julia Kristeva. Then, in agreement with Norton's three definitions of subjectivity, the following section discusses the feminist poststructuralist reading of subjectivity as fluid and bound with language. Ultimately, the analysis of the three definitions (aspects) is applied to the empirical data from the interviews conducted, to reaffirm the relevance of language in the practice of subjectivity emergence and reconfiguration.

¹ It should be pointed out that, referring to Michel Foucault and Bonny Norton, the terms of 'identity' and 'subjectivity' are used interchangeably; however, the nuanced differences between the concepts are emphasized, particularly in the context of disciplinary gaze and subjection vis-à-vis the understanding of subjectivity.

Theoretical Framework

Tackling the subject position in discourse, in his lecture on the relationship among the text, reader, and the author, Michel Foucault asks a set of thought-provoking questions regarding the subject's appearance, position, and functions within the discourse. He contends that "the subject (and its substitutes) must be stripped of its creative role and analyzed as a complex and variable function of discourse" (1977, p. 138). In that regard, it can be assumed that the position of the subject is more complex, and should be assessed from multiple points of view. Furthermore, Foucault explains that a person becomes the subject in two ways, by being subjected to some governing mode of power or through the subjection of one's own identity to the disciplining power of self-knowledge (1982; 1988). In other words, besides from the broader scope of the governance of subjects within the specific relations of power and knowledge, we see subjects as also structured through deliberate practice of internalization of a disciplinary gaze, through the practice of self-care, and enunciation of desires. Therefore, if we take the self-regulatory practice of governance as a representative factor of elicitation and promotion of subjectivities through self-reflection, the study of identity can be acknowledged as being always in process or in-the-making.

Having noted the relevance of Foucault's premise on subject construction, the poststructuralist perception of the subject constitution in and through language should be addressed. To grasp the relationship between an individual and the social, Foucault constructs the concept of a (bipolar) discursive field, a site of constant discord between the ways of meaning-making and organizing of the social institutions and practices (1977). These moments of 'institutional' competitiveness can be explained through the existence of dominant and marginal discursive fields. For instance, in the prevailing discourses of power, such as family, church, or education, we cannot account for all of them equally. Some discourses will disseminate unified or transcendent subject values that reaffirm the status quo (Weedon, 1987), while the hegemonic system of meanings will cast away the others that try and challenge it (*Ibid.*, p. 35). If this logic is applied to the Japanese system of English language education, it can be seen that the constitution of desirable subjectivities within the context of internationalization policies is funded and promulgated by the government. Interestingly, within the very discourse of internationalization, there is little evidence of the personal, lived, narratives of the participants in the programs (Nonaka, 2018). Thus, the experiences of Japanese people, women to be more precise, should be understood as the founding block of Japanese discourse of internationalization, especially concerning the desirable subjectivity formation and its potential to diverge with the collectivizing power arrangements that attempt to construct normative versions of subjectivity *per se*.

The problematization of desire by Bronwyn Davies (1990) might encapsulate the notions of competitiveness mentioned above, to rearticulate the desire in the feminist poststructuralist context, and attest to its subversive interpretation. Davies reflects on various humanist perceptions of desire as transcendental and indicative of the human essence. However, relying on the feminist poststructuralist theory, she detects "different lived patterns of desire" (*Ibid.*, p. 501). These patterns do not categorize people according to the binding logic of

binary oppositions into prescriptive categories of femininity and masculinity, on the contrary, they extend the poststructuralist perception of the fluid (multiple) identities to the understanding of desire as “a movement amongst a multiplicity ways of being” (p. 501). Furthermore, she argues, desire is “spoken into existence” (1990, p. 500); it is articulated through Kristeva’s concepts of symbolic and semiotic via the discursive and interactive processes. The symbolic and semiotic stand for two modalities of the same signifying process that are to be perceived as interlocking and in an incessant dialectical relationship that constitutes the type of discourse (Kristeva, 1984, p. 24). With that in mind, the enunciative capacity of desire, it is essential to look into the processes behind the construction of both desires and desired subjectivities in and through language.

Chris Weedon (1987) states that the capacity of poststructuralist theoretical assessment of the general social milieu, encompassing organizations, power, and individual inclinations, resides in language. According to Weedon, language must be seen as a site of generation and contestation of some aspects of social organization and their political consequences. Moreover, she continues, language is always to be referred to as already socio-historically determined by a multiplicity of discourses, through the acknowledgment of which it is possible to pertain it to the relevant site of political struggle (pp. 21-24). In that sense, the position of the subject of enunciation is indispensable for language, its structure, and conscious subjectivity itself. Subjectivity is then expressed through the individual’s conscious and unconscious, and her perception and relation to the world (Weedon, p. 32).

Bonny Norton picks up on the Foucauldian approach to discourse and claims that the subjectivity in poststructuralist theory is discursively articulated and “always socially and historically embedded” (2013, p. 4). This aspect opens up the space for feminist poststructuralist theory to articulate it as ever-fluctuating, i.e., as prone to changes caused by a multiplicity of discursive fields that construe it (Weedon, p. 33). She asserts that the feminist poststructuralist construction of subjectivity has tremendous explanatory potential because it centralizes women’s experience and methods that connect the women’s lived experience with the social power in the context of identity studies. Norton argues that subjectivity is comprised of three defining characteristics. These are the nonunitary or multiple nature of the subject, subjectivity as a site of struggle, and the temporal quality of subjectivity as ever-changing in time (p. 161).

The Non-Unitary Subject

Speaking of the aforementioned perception, of subjectivity defining one’s both conscious and unconscious thoughts, Weedon (1987) discusses the psychoanalytic developments to explain the precariousness of the conscious subjectivity, or the symbolic order, that is continuously challenged by the unconscious one. In other words, to understand the unitary potency of psychoanalytic subjectivity, Weedon hypothesizes about the nonunitary subjectivity by reflecting on the work of Julia Kristeva, particularly her conceptualization of the subject in process, where she challenges the humanist

perception of the discursively rational and symbolically enunciative unitary subject.

Through her work on the theory of language, Kristeva (1984) addresses non-poststructuralist theories of language that envisage language as a finite object or a dead matter that is without any prior regard for the speaking subject. More specifically, her view of the theories of the philosophers of language is rather critical because they tend to categorize and catalog the language per se. However, through her conceptualization of the modalities of semiotic and symbolic, it can be inferred that the signifying practice that is both produced and intelligible through language overcomes the capitalist methods of language stratification and “attests to a “crisis” of social structures and their ideological, coercive, and necrophilic manifestations” (p. 15). Therefore, language is not to be studied apart from the subject of enunciation, which not only incorporates both semantic and logical fields but reflects on their intersection and “*intersubjective-relations*,” omnipresent both intra and trans-linguistically (p. 23, emphasis in the original text).

In *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984), Kristeva speaks about the language as a signifying process depicted through the interconnectedness of the two inseparable modalities, semiotic and symbolic. The signifying process operates in two ways, she argues. The symbolic modality reflects in the manifestation of the clear or ‘real’ meaning, always conveyed by the spoken word. The modality of semiotic refers to the interplay of rhythmical processes of the drives and feelings residing in the unconscious, that are ‘waiting’ to be released into the symbolic. The semiotic is, hence, understood to be continuously ‘discharged’ into the symbolic, where it threatens to disrupt the ‘normal’ symbolic order. Therefore, Weedon concludes that conscious subjectivity is “inherently unstable” (p. 87) and always in the making.

Furthermore, by bringing up the Kristevan concept of *negativity*, Weedon posits that these discourses demonstrate the fragility of unitary subjectivity and open up the space for “the articulation of the subject in process” (p. 89). In other words, to describe the not inherently negative ‘nature’ of semiotic drives, Kristeva brings up the concept of *Semiotic Chora* to define a space in the unconscious, that simultaneously generates and negates the subject, by implicating the very fragility of the unified subject that is continuously challenged by the processes that produce her/him. She names this process ‘negativity’ and posits that it is manifested in the discourses of the non-symbolic that incessantly challenge the unified or transcendent nature of the subject (Ibid.). That said, meaningful language cannot function without this interplay of the semiotic and symbolic. Despite the emergence of subjectivity upon the entrance into the modality of the symbolic, the semiotic is not to be left behind; it is to remain in a constant connection with the symbolic and constitute meaningful language along the way. Thus, the dialectical relationship, as such, can be considered representative of the non-transcendent depiction of subjectivity.

The non-transcendent subjectivity must be addressed with a specific dose of caution since it reminds of how precarious a self is, and implies that the self should always proactively work on understanding and acting upon the surrounding world while emphasizing the relevance of lived experience (Bloom & Munro, 1995). Bloom and Munro’s position regarding the beneficial role of the

discussion on subjectivity within the field of empirical research accentuates the transformative power of the nonunitary approach. According to them, the assessment of subjectivity as ‘inprocess’ brings about the transformative layer to the discussion of the unequal gender relations. Moreover, by applying the concept of nonunitary identity to her empirical data, Norton (2013) emphasizes the value of the approach for the assessment of the women’s lived experiences, particularly in the context of second language learning. Also, she interprets her empirical data as subversive, where the pluralistic understanding of identity resurfaces through the process of negotiation of selves among the immigrant women who participated in her study.

That said, to illustrate this point, the articulation of identity as nonunitary will be applied to the data obtained through the interviews conducted with two Japanese women. I will analyze the narratives provided by Hazuki (27) and Aya (27), two girls from Tokyo whom both had the experience of being involved in the process of internationalization at some points in their lives. Hazuki studied at a university in the United States, while Aya first went to Australia to study English and afterward attended Business School in Milan. Currently, Aya lives and works in the USA, while Hazuki still resides in Japan. Since the interviews with the girls were conducted before Aya’s departure to the USA, the paper will discuss her internationalist experience as relevant for understanding the concept of nonunitary identity.

Aya

Aya is a girl who has been interested in English ever since she was an undergraduate student. She even wrote her B.A. thesis on the topic of English as a lingua franca, a research that led her to expand her social network of foreign contacts and to her eventual decision to enroll in a master’s program abroad. During the interview, Aya profoundly criticized Japanese society and its isolationist and homogeneous inclinations. She points out that people in Japan do not feel like going abroad; there is no need for such an enterprise whatsoever. In order to explain the reasons behind her initial departure and the desire for the world outside Japan, she says: “If you are not happy you always want something, you know. If people are satisfied, they do not need to look the other way” (Aya, 2018). Therefore, understanding identity as nonunitary applies to Aya’s attitude towards the English language and the homogenizing tendency of Japan. Reflecting on the emotive aspect of her identity, the equalization of happiness with the learning of new things, Aya positions herself as a subject already in process. The action indicates that the process of her subjectivity development is still ongoing since she succeeded in departing from Japan and stationing herself in the USA.

Also, according to Aya, her identity change converges with her position within the Japanese business institutions, which she sees invaluable for her future professional progress. As she states, knowing the ropes about the business style can be very useful later in life, particularly regarding the experience of the “unique approach in Japanese business style.” While speaking assertively about her professionally-oriented goals, another aspect of her nonunitary identity can be detected. By assuming the position of agency and transgressing the masculinist

discourse of Japan, I interpret her professional goals in agreement with Bloom and Munro, who posit that:

subjectivity evolves in women's struggle to be "competent" as professionals while not "disappearing." Central to this struggle and the evolution of subjectivity is the redefinition of authority and power to resonate more with female selfhood. Interpreting these contested sites of female selfhood and professional authority provides not only a clearer understanding of nonunitary subjectivity but also suggests alternative understandings of power and authority (1995, pp. 104-105).

Therefore, her desire to learn English can be understood as a corollary to her identity development, which encompasses her professional goals, transnational desires, and criticism of the collectivizing tendency of Japanese culture. Thus, analyzing the developmental aspects of her nonunitary identity enables me to establish a tentative trajectory of her identification by bringing forward all of the different aspects of her identity in the context of the social relations of power. In that sense, Aya's position within the discourses of SLA and internationalization can be rephrased in Foucauldian terminology to indicate the potency of a subject to emerge as autonomous upon her utter subjectification to the internalizing disciplinary relations of power imposed by the discourse of foreign language learning.

Hazuki

Hazuki is a woman who is working in a successful advertising company in Japan whom I had a chance of meeting personally as well, besides from the Skype interview. She considers her work schedule slightly busy and limiting; however, she sees the opportunities to use English at the workplace beneficial given her previous educational background in the United States. Back in Japan, she is reacquainting with the Japanese lifestyle and struggling with some core elements of the Japanese etiquette. She asserts that upon her return home, certain "anomalies" (Bird, 2018) in her, at the time 'usual,' Americanized, self occurred. Agreeing with Aya's criticism of the homogenous culture of Japan, Hazuki criticizes the gendered aspect of the Japanese patriarchal lifestyle, which drives many women to pursue foreign interests. She declares that ever since she was a young girl, she thought:

it was interesting to communicate with people from other countries. Also, when it comes to the future, you know, like in senior high school, people always think about the future of going to university, going to work, or going to any of the special schools, or something like that. I was like, oh, maybe I want to study, maybe I want to communicate with other people not only with Japanese people, so I just decided to study abroad in the States (Hazuki, 2018).

By driving her to do away with the totalizing self of being Japanese, through the negotiation with and the emergence of a different identification, that moment can be seen as formative of her identity. While summarizing her narrative with a potential plan of leaving Japan, Hazuki sees Japanese culture as smothering and retaking her in its grasp, which she points out with an exclamation of "Oh my Gosh, I am getting Japanese!" In this statement, it is clear what Foucault says about the becoming of the subject; it is either through the submission to a type of

governing power or one's disciplinary gaze of self-knowledge. Therefore, Hazuki's automatic response can be interpreted as the negation of the re-subjectification to the homogenous discourse of Japanese society and the prescriptive norms of the internationalization practices. Also, regarding Kristeva's take on the subject in process, Hazuki stands as a representative example of how subjectivity emerges and reemerges through the interplay of the conscious and unconscious desires (symbolic and semiotic), to reinstate the ever-fragile perception of the subjectivity per se. In sum, subjectivity is not supposed to be understood as unitary and centered, on the contrary, Kristeva, Foucault, and Norton contend that it is to be understood as multiple and decentred, which builds up a space for the analysis of the second characteristic that defines subjectivity as contradictory or a site of struggle (2013).

Subjectivity as a Site of Struggle

Drawing on Foucault's theory of the discursive fields, one can see that a person's access to specific modes of subjectivity and identity is "structured through power relations of inclusion and exclusion" which foreground their argumentation on the assertion of the visual differences, particularly noticeable in the discourses of racism, patriarchy, and homophobia (Weedon, 2004, p. 13). Weedon posits that the essence of the discursive fields in question is comprised of multiple diverging discourses that differently fashion subjects and subjectivities. Hence, understanding the language as constitutive of the subject and identity acknowledges the subjection of the identities to processes of cultural struggle (Ibid., 2004). In that sense, to refer to identity as a site of struggle corresponds with the poststructuralist perception of identity as nonunitary. Alternatively, as Norton puts it, "if identity were unitary, fixed and immutable, it could not be subject to change over time and space, nor subject to contestation" (2013, p. 164).

In the context of SLA, to better explain the relationship between the desired target language and learner's desire to practice the language, Norton (2013) develops the concept of 'investment.' According to her, the learners' investment in studying a foreign language presupposes their desire for acquisition of any symbolic resources (*Bourdieuian* capitals), which will result in their better social positioning and the better 'ranking' on the scale of hegemonic power relations. In that sense, she sees the investment as indispensable to the identity, and within the concept, she converges "a learner's desire and commitment to learn a language, and their complex and changing identity" (2013, p. 6).

That said, if I maintain the dualistic framework set by Norton, regarding the perception of identity as contested and linguistically bound with the learners' investment in studying a foreign language, I will try to problematize Japanese women's access and appropriation of subjectivities tailored according to the inequitable power relations' policies of collectivization and exclusion. To reflect on these relations of power vis-à-vis their positioning of Japanese women, the interviews with three more research participants, Saki (32), Michina (36), and Tomi (37), will be analyzed.

Saki

Saki currently resides in Washington, D.C., for a research fellowship. She sees her one-year opportunity to work on the conservation of oil paintings in America significant for her career since it gives her a chance to access different artwork to the one in Japan. Having been acquainted with the 'strict' Japanese etiquette, she feels quite liberated in the USA, which she particularly assigns to her relationship with the people around her, the university staff, and foreign friends. Regarding her desire to learn English, she admits that she was not interested in learning English at first, because of her overwhelming school schedule; however, realizing that, among the siblings, she was the only one who could not speak English inspired a change in her disposition towards the language. Gradually, her view started changing, and with it, her identity. Having invested a vast amount of time and effort in her English acquisition, she decided to boost her language learning through the various acts of socialization and language exchange, such as participation in the global homestay service of CouchSurfing.

Talking about the experience as a host in the program, she reflects on the not so pleasant situation she faced with concerning an American man, whom she corresponded by messenger app. She says:

I met an American man in person, after texting for a while and wanted to show him around Tokyo. I don't know why, but he knew much more about Tokyo than me. He took me to a skyscraper so we could see the beautiful night view and he proposed to me. [...] I thought he tried to find a woman to marry him, and, of course, I rejected him. [...] As I talked with him, I realized that he wanted a *typical* Japanese woman (Saki, 2019).

The "typical Japanese woman" seems to be an archetypal description of the group of Japanese women infatuated with the West. Through the studies conducted by Karen Kelsky and Ingrid Piller and Kimie Takahashi, we are familiarized with the construction of a particular Occidental identity among these women, whose desire for the West regulates their very subjectivities (2001; 2006). The excerpt from the interview with Saki can be interpreted as her assertion of the subjectivity against, presumably, collectivizing attitude of a Western man towards Japanese women. Saki manages to overcome the stereotypical labeling of her own self and emerge as an agent of her own choices. Therefore, through the act of refusal of the marriage proposal, Saki creates the opportunity for the reconceptualization of her identity as a nontypical Japanese woman who is not afraid to say 'no' to an 'idealized' Western self. Moreover, she manages to do away with the internalized and fetishizing Orientalist gaze, which positioned Japanese women as ever-inferior to both Western and Japanese men (Kelsky, 2001). Through the enunciation of her subjectivity, Saki overcomes the construct of the conventionally 'submissive' and 'typical' Japanese woman and reinstates herself as a signifier of her own subjectivity in the subversive discourse of female empowerment.

Michina

The interview with Michina, a woman who currently lives in the U.S. with her Australian fiancé, was quite informative, it provided me with a more profound

understanding of how some Japanese women participating in the SLA scene perceive themselves in relation to the other Japanese and the people in the West. Throughout the interview, Michina reflected on her vast experience in the foreign language acquisition process and made an emphasis on the significance of the financial burden it posed to her budget. At the age of 24, she went to Hawaii to study English; however, the experience did not turn out to be satisfactory, and she resorted to more arduous methods of learning English. After the series of purchased C.D.s proved to be both expensive and ineffective, she decided to change her approach to language learning and challenge “typically Japanese way of thinking.” Diverting her attention towards English and Irish bars, she says that “meeting a foreigner in a bar equals a free lesson” (Michina, 2019).

Asides from the benefits of learning English in these bars, Michina felt these places were more fun and liberating than the “Japanese bars.” To say it differently, her identity as a Japanese woman got conflicted with her accustomation to the “casual” atmosphere of these bars. Not only are these bars mostly visited by foreigners, but they offer a plethora of engaging programs where one can easily interact and meet the others. Throughout these events, Michina managed to meet a lot of foreign people, men to be more specific, and started rethinking her subjectivity. In the same way, as Saki previously mentioned, Michina defines Japanese etiquette as notoriously strict, which makes her feel frustrated every time she returns to Japan. By expressing a specific dose of confusion with and not-belonging to either of the two countries, her identity feels like being conflicted between Japanese and the (newly acquired) American one. As a Japanese who is dating a Western man, she is ostracized and judged by the Japanese community, “treated like garbage,” as she puts it, while, in America, she feels othered on the racial basis because of her non-Western looks. This aspect of her narrative, allows me to interpret her subjectivity as being in a constant contestation, or split, because to potentially ‘fit’ either of the places, she is to regulate her own self according to the rules applied. As Kristeva would argue, the language is to be seen as inseparable from the undulating signifying process, that can be transposed to the very process of formation of one’s subjectivity (1984). Therefore, Michina’s detachment from both socio-cultural surroundings (Japan and the U.S.) implicates the potency of her investment to learn English as a subversive marker of the changing nature of the subjectivity through the linguistic prowess and diligence. She confidently states that she feels like expressing herself in English is the right path for her, and she does not plan to return to Japan any time soon. Therefore, it can be said that even though her subjectivity succumbed to an overpowering (two-fold) social influence, a self emerges upon the enunciative power of subjectivity; she asserts her identity through her desire to speak English and acknowledges it is an action that is to be understood as ongoing.

Tomi

After the Skype interview, I had the pleasure of meeting Tomi personally during my field trip research in Japan in November 2019. She currently resides in Toronto, Canada, where, in order to prolong her visa, she enrolled in a Canadian college in the spring of 2018, and now studies Business Administration. Reflecting

on the SLA field, Tomi says that, when she was younger, she believed that learning English from the native English speakers was the best option for her; however, she eventually changed her mind and opted for the bilingual teachers of English. One of the significant things I noticed while interviewing her was that she considers English as a crucial factor for feeling positive about herself, which is the opposite of how the Japanese language makes her feel. Moreover, Tomi expresses dissatisfaction with Japanese culture in general, which she even calls the “group culture,” an equivalent to the concept of homogenization Aya and Hazuki previously mentioned. Interestingly, she defines the Japanese culture by comparing it to the Canadian (Western) culture, where she positions her identity as a potentially Western one. She elaborates her answer by saying that:

I have been thinking about Japanese culture; it's like a *group culture*, where all you want to do is to follow each other and do whatever the other people are doing. However, in North America or Canada, it is quite the opposite. Everyone wants to have individuality, individualistic versus group mentality, so that is why I wanted to come here, to get away with that culture. I still like Japanese culture, but I needed a different experience (Tomi, 2018-2019, emphasis added).

Identical to Saki and Michina, Tomi explains how she wanted to do away with Japanese culture, and how following all the rules imposed on the people in Japan felt suffocating, leading to her eventual refusal to keep any of the Japanese cultural practices. She considers a good thing to get used to the Canadian way of life and, in a way, ‘forget’ to be Japanese. Assuming a critical attitude towards one’s native culture unravels the machinations behind the constitution of a subject in process. Therefore, Tomi’s critical assessment of the Japanese culture and her self-marginalization from the normative tendencies of Japanese society are indicative of the split nature of the subject, whose dialectical relation between the semiotic and symbolic is in perpetual flux in order to synthesize the further development of some new subjectivity. In sum, Tomi does not give up on her internationalist plans; she sees herself as an accomplished ‘individual’ who succeeded in overcoming the collectivizing Japanese self by challenging her own subjectivity and positioning herself in the “different way of life.” In that regard, the situations these three women find themselves enmeshed in signal the divisive power behind the structuring potential of the assertion of one’s identity and serve as a fruitful ground for the further discussion of identity as affective across the temporal dimensions of discourse.

Identity as Changeable Over Time

In the third characteristic of subjectivity formation, Norton (2013) explains that the quality of identity to change over time is an extension of the perception of the identity as nonunitary, contradictory, and a site of struggle. As mentioned earlier, we can understand subjectivity as always socially and historically positioned, and, in that regard, adding a temporal dimension to its conceptualization would be self-explanatory. Speaking in the context of the SLA practice, we can think of the formative stages of language acquisition as presupposing the constitution of one’s subjectivity. Weedon (1987) sees the process of growing up as relevant in detecting potential sites of resistance, or counter-discourses a subject is to be

identified by. For instance, in the homogenizing culture of Japan, as observed through the interviews, finding an alternative discourse of belonging poses a significant challenge for the identities of my participants. Their recognition of the existence of contradictory identities can be interpreted as the reconfiguration of the personal experiences in the homogenizing discourse of internationalization and Occidentalism.

To illustrate the temporal dimension of identity construction, I will combine the data from all five interviews, since the aspect of temporality contributes to a better understanding of a 'general' background of both nonunitary and conflicting identity. If Saki's and Hazuki's narratives are addressed from the temporal perspective, it can be seen that both of them proclaim how their identities have changed over time, and how their subjectivities can still be addressed as in process, or ongoing. Hence, through the context of the technologies of power and the self that objectify or inspire the self-transformation of an individual (Foucault, 1988), the educational institutions Saki and Hazuki mention can be discerned as influential in the ideological knowledge production. Also, since the second parties inspired both Saki's and Hazuki's English learning, it can be inferred that the practice of identity formation is closely connected with the competitiveness of the speaking subject, who overcomes the conflicting drive of the split subjectivity through the enunciative practice of language learning and transgresses with governing power imposed through conventional knowledge production.

Observing Tomi's, Aya's, and Michina's experiences within the framework of subjectivity as temporally affected appears to be interesting because it allows us to critically address the nonunitary subjectivities that are dialectically torn across binaries. It can be seen that time plays a significant role in the construction of their subjectivities that emerge and remerge via the praxis of negativity of a self within the signifying processes of identity formation and accomplishment of the agency. Through their narratives, the learners' investment can be pinpointed as a crucial drive in the reconceptualization of their selves, since, solely through the mastering of the desired language do they see their goals achieved.

Conclusion

As the paper argued, feminist poststructuralist theory articulates the identity as fluctuating, or in process. The heterogeneous nature of the subject is discussed from both macro and microdynamics' take on the subject formation, where theories posited by Michel Foucault and Julia Kristeva serve as the guideline for the establishment of further feminist and linguistic assertions regarding the problematics of subjectivity on trial. Foucault and Kristeva conceptualized the subject as conflicted internally. In other words, their subject in discourse appears to be dialectically constituted via the perpetuation of the processes of emergence (generation) and negativity of the very subject that unravel the undulation of the signifying processes subject finds herself enmeshed in. Moreover, extending the Foucauldian and Kristevan theories to the scopes of SLA and feminist poststructuralist theory postulated by Norton and Weedon, the approach to subjectivity gets extended to its multiple definitions and contextualization within the praxis of foreign language learning. The subjectivity is articulated from three

different angles, as the nonunitary, site of struggle, and temporally affected. Therefore, taking the three aspects of subjectivity as the subversive of the humanist concept of subjectivity as transcendent and unitary, reaffirms the feminist implication of subversion, particularly in the context of the undoing of the conventional (prescriptive) governing power of institutional knowledge production.

The theories of identity mentioned above were applied to the narratives of Japanese women collected through empirical research and interviews. The data collected were analyzed accordingly with Norton's suggestion of the triple definition of subjectivity and addressed the transnational experience of Japanese women as formative of the development of one's subjectivity in general. Therefore, it can be concluded, that SLA circumstances Japanese women get involved in influence the constitution of one's identity. These narratives reaffirm the interpretation of Japanese women's identity as nonunitary. Also, through the formative role of the English language, they manage to signify novel (transnational) subjectivities that can be traced dialectically. In that sense, the trajectory of the subjectivity in fluctuation must be followed across transnational, socio-cultural, linguistic, and temporal dimensions, because, as we have seen, the subject emerges at the intersection of these discourses, and to pinpoint its development more accurately, more detailed investigation of each would be necessary.

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