Seeking Possibilities for Creating Gender and Sexuality Affirmative Language
Classrooms with Queer Narratives and Voices
ジェンダー/セクシュアリティの視点から考えるクラス作り：
クィアー学生の声と共に

Motoki Long-Nozawa, The University of British Columbia (UBC)
ロング野澤基, ブリティッシュ・コロンビア大学

*UBC is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Musqueam
people. I sincerely thank them for having cared for the beautiful land.*

1. Introduction

The calls for conducting research on queer students in Japanese language classroom settings derive from my personal experience using Japanese and inspiration from a growing body of research on gender and sexuality in language education as well as the dearth of research on the subject (see Paiz, 2021).

As a child who questioned my gender and sexuality while growing up, I struggled to use a variety of gendered styles of Japanese speech such as first-person pronouns, sentence endings particles, and intonation patterns. My struggle was created between the socio-cultural norms of the gendered Japanese speech imposed on me and how I wanted to use the language to construct my gender and sexual identities.

Looking into a body of literature on queer teachers and students in second/foreign languages education in general and Japanese language education in particular, I was inspired by the works that strive to create inclusive spaces and apply queer theories (e.g., Cahnmann-Taylor & Coda, 2019; Moore, 2021b; Nelson, 2009). Last December, the International Network of Gender, Sexuality, and Japanese Language Education was launched. A growing interest in and concern about gender, sexuality, and Japanese language education has advanced our knowledge about gender, sexuality, and language teaching-learning. However, we still have the known and need to continue to engage in "pedagogical questions about the links between language learning and social identities" (Block, 2003 & 2007) including gender and sexual identities and beyond.

2. Possibilities and Queer

The title of the presentation is "Seeking possibilities for creating gender and sexuality affirmative language classrooms with queer narratives and voices," which is part of my larger MA research project. Two of the key words in the title—*possibilities* and *queer*—require some clarification.

Possibilities

Judith Butler (1999) articulates the initial aim of *Gender Trouble*, one of the canonical books in queer theory:

> The aim of the text was to open up the field of possibility for gender without dictating which kinds of possibilities ought to be realized. One might wonder what use 'opening up possibilities' finally is, but no one who has understood what it is to live in the social world as what is 'impossible,' illegible, unrealizable, unreal, and illegitimate is likely to pose that question. (p. viii)

Knisley and Paiz (2021), in their article discussing trans, non-binary, and queer students in language education, align with Butler: "Our goal here is not to outline *the* pedagogical approach, but to draw attention to the range of possibilities that exist in creating locally relevant, culturally responsive pedagogies that can speak to students' and educators' lived experiences" (p. 29). So understood, the possibilities that will be presented in my paper are *some* of the possibilities. They were discursively produced locally and are intended to be applied to their local context. However, simultaneously, I hope they will inspire possibilities for other contexts.

Queer

Queer in this presentation is used as "an umbrella term to refer to both non-heteronormative gender and sexual identities" (Nguyen & Yang, 2015, pp. 221-222). Also, queer, instead of 2SLGBTQIA+ and 2SLGBTQ+, has a specific purpose in drawing a theoretical distinction between lesbian and gay studies and women's studies and queer theory. Lesbian and gay studies and women's studies have been theorized primarily based on "a humanist or modernist view" (Nelson, 2009, p. 19) characterized as essentialism. Lesbian, gay, or woman as a group respectively raise voices for "promoting civil rights, debating controversial social issues" (Ibid., p.210). "Representation" and "social justice," for instance, are frequently campaigned in lesbian and gay studies and women's studies. By contrast, queer theory bases its theorizing on social constructionism, and queer theorists question the very categories of lesbian, gay, and woman circulated by lesbian and gay studies and women's studies. The social constructionist view—especially many of the poststructuralists—conceptualizes "identities as cultural and discursive acts" (Ibid., p. 21), which have been developed by criticizing the essentialist view of identity characterized as "inner core" or "unified self." One of the important projects among queer theorists is to investigate and disrupt the processes in which certain identities are normalized and others are marginalized. Queer, in this sense, is, in short, "as queer does" (Cahnmann-Taylor & Coda, 2022, p. 133) by troubling normative practices with regard to gender and sexuality.

3. Research Design

For my larger MA research study, from which I am presenting some data in the paper, two semi-structured interviews were conducted, and two writings were produced per participant. In this paper, I refer to Writing II and Interview II, which focus on exploring linguistic and pedagogical practices that have possibilities for creating gender and sexual identity affirmative language classrooms.

4. About the Participant

Travis (*He/his/him* or *They/their/them*, pseudonym), one of the participants, identifies as bisexual (sexual orientation), cis gender (gender identity), and feminine/androgynous (gender expression). His Japanese studies in classroom setting began after his move to Central Japan as an exchange student while in college in Western Canada. Prior to the move to Japan, his interest in Japanese language and culture was low, and his knowledge about and proficiency in the language were extremely limited. His Japanese language studies took place at a Japanese university specializing in foreign language studies and outside of the classroom social networking including, but not limited to, friendships, community services, and travel encounters. Both the inside and

outside of the classroom times provided numerous opportunities for him to advance his Japanese proficiency and familiarity of Japanese culture during his yearlong stay in Japan. After his return to Canada, his Japanese studies continued at a university that offers up to advanced level Japanese language and culture courses. His successful completion of upper-advanced level Japanese courses demonstrates his commitment to and outstanding achievement in his Japanese studies. Travis decided to continue to study Japanese and Japanese literature in graduate school located in Canada.

5. Research Questions

My research exploration is guided by the following questions: What linguistic and pedagogical practices Travis hopes to see in language classrooms and how the possibilities are pedagogically conceptualized.

6. Analytical Lenses
Social Identity

Norton (2016) conceptualizes identity as "the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (p. 476). The on-going exploration of social relationality is key, in which one strives to construct their identities within the social world and across their life. Identities emerge with "not only a reconstruction of past communities and historically constituted, but also a community of imagination, a desired community that offers possibilities for an enhanced range of identity options in the future" (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 415). The mentioning of past reconstruction and future possibilities that are woven into the present discursive formation deconstructs how we frequently conceive of time as a sequence that progresses from the past, through the present, into the future. So conceptualized fundamentally, identity, for Norton, is "multiple, a site of struggle, and changing over time" (Norton, 1995, p. 14).

Translanguaging Space

The central premise of translanguaging is that bilinguals or multilinguals refer to their whole linguistic and cultural repertoires in communicating. As opposed to code-switching, a well-known concept in language education, that suggests the existence of separate language codes in one's brain, translanguaging scholars argue that "there is but one linguistic system with features that are integrated throughout" (García & Wei, 2013, p. 15).

Translanguaging space is "a space for the act of translanguaging as well as a space created through translanguaging" (Wei, 2011, p. 1223). A space for the act of translanguaging signifies bilinguals' or multilinguals' "capacity to use multiple linguistic resources to form and transform their own lives" (Ibid.); a space created through translanguaging illuminates "its own transformative power" (Ibid.) generated through translanguaging practices.

Translanguaging spaces that are discursively constructed through communicative interactions embrace the concepts of *creativity*—"the ability to choose between following and flouting the rules and norms of behaviour"—and *criticality*—"the ability to use available evidence appropriately, systematically and insightfully to inform considered views of cultural, social and linguistic situations" (Ibid.). In Wei's research (2011) that

examined the discursive construction of identities by multilingual Chinese youth in Britain, creativity and criticality are elicited by the analysis of their multilingual practices that entailed "tension, conflict, competition, difference, change in a number of spheres, ranging from ideologies, policies, and practices to historical and current context" (pp. 1223-24). This research provides insights from the translanguaging perspective into how bilinguals and multilinguals navigate and craft their lives in the world. Also, it directs educators' attention to the moments of tension, conflict, change, etc., in relation to translanguaging practices in the social world, that bilinguals and multilinguals experience and make, in which they discursively construct their identities.

The concepts of "social identity" and "translanguaging space" help to draw attention to the production of reality in language learning as students develop linguistic abilities and a multilingual sense of self (Knisely & Paiz, 2021)

7. Findings
Gender indexicalities

One of the linguistic and teaching practices Travis hopes to see more in class concerns gender indexicality of Japanese. As Arimori (2020) identifies, when the textbooks and teacher's manuals explain gendered language, the explanation or information tends to be deterministic, insufficient, or cis- and heteronormative; in other cases, it is not touched on. The limitation of textbooks and teacher's manuals, coupled with teachers' lack of awareness of the significance of teaching gendered forms of speech and failure to cultivate inclusivity, generates a moment like the one Travis describes,

> I recall an instance where a larger man in my class had accidently used the 「ね」語尾 in a way that sounded particularly feminine. My teacher instantly began laughing, explaining that she 'found it so funny to hear such a feminine manner of speech come out of this huge masculine dude.' The class laughed and thought it was quite humorous – and I laughed along – but inside, I felt increasingly insecure with how to express my queer identity, an identity that did not fit within the gender binary of Japanese speech.

After several years of using Japanese, Travis laments that "one thing, for example, that I did not learn until quite late in my Japanese studies is how Japanese is heavily indexical in comparison to English–by indexicality, I refer to the relation between an utterance and its surrounding context." He refers to, for instance, a *keigo* phrase くださいませ.

Takasaki (2004) suggests that "Woman Language," such as the phrase くださいませ, is not "a well-established unchanging entity" (p. 160). Therefore, they argue that gendered forms should be examined "from the viewpoint of their function" (Ibid.). This is equivalent to what Travis means by indexicality.

The acquisition of gendered language including gender indexicalities in and with particular contexts and figures is of importance for Travis. He discusses an effective way to learn about them that helped him deconstruct the gender binarism. "One method that I have personally used to speak Japanese in a gender/sexually affirmative way involves watching videos of Youtuber's whose gender identity seems similar to my own." It is through "the process of finding youtubers who (1) have a similar gender identity to oneself, and (2) speak in a way that one finds desirable, then shadowing these youtubers, and recording certain phrases that one enjoys" that Travis broadened his repertoire

needed to construct his gender identity, developed understanding of the nuances of gendered speech, and disrupted the normalized gender binarism. The effectiveness and accessibility of internet resources outside of the textbook such as YouTube can be helpful in giving "students the tools that they need to speak in a gender/sexually affirmative way," Travis asserts. Brown and Cheek (2017) also encourage, with criticality, the use of media sources while teaching and learning Japanese in classroom settings, considering the lack of materials with regard to various ways to construct gender identity in Japanese.

Proactive group research projects

While taking an upper-level Japanese language course, Travis studied about genderless fashion and transgender rights in Japan. His research had a pivotal influence on his gendered language use and gender identity construction. The course progressed with discussions and project-based learning. One of the topics focused on "sex and sexuality in Japanese culture," and Travis, with two other classmates, decided to continue to research "genderless fashion" as their group project. He describes the project-based learning as follows: "What was especially helpful about this project is that, while it framed the topic within gender and sex, it also provided students the freedom to interpret and research the topic in their own unique way." Proactive research involvement, afforded by the curricular decision made by his instructor and their pedagogical practices, allowed the group to dive in and kept them inspired throughout and beyond the project. By learning various, unique ways of genderless fashion, Travis strongly felt that he "was able to directly confront and break past the gender binary I had encountered in Japanese studies." The learning outcome exceeded the focus of the research project on genderless fashion and affected his speech by making him "more comfortable with the concept of 'genderless' in Japanese society." Travis testifies by stating that "I felt like I no longer had to worry about gender while speaking, and that I could more freely express my gender identity through speech."

Educators need to be reminded of some indications, made by Nelson (2009) and Moore (2021a), of debating gender, sexuality, and queer matters in language education settings. Moore (2021a) questions "arguments that question whether their relationships are worthy of recognition and protection by the state, whether they are fit to raise children, and whether who they are is real or not…create a safe space for them to learn" (p. 363). Since I do not have data detailing the classroom discussions Travis participated in nor did I observe the class, the pedagogical practices that produced Travis' learning outcomes cannot be investigated in this paper. However, what I can present here is that the proactive, group research project incorporated into the curriculum of the course opened up possibilities of Travis advancing his gender identity construction and Japanese language learning.

8. Research Questions Revisited

The two research questions specified above were 1) what linguistic and pedagogical practices Travis hopes to see in language classrooms and 2) how the possibilities are pedagogically conceptualized. Travis hopes to learn more about gender indexicalities of Japanese to explore gendered speech in a nuanced, functional way in order to construct his gender identity. Also, he subscribes to projects that generate students' proactive engagement. In the learning opportunities Travis experienced, the possibilities of disrupting the linguistic and cultural norms and developing a sense of self

were discursively produced in and from the realm of intersubjectivity. As a bilingual and bicultural person, Travis experienced "tension, conflict, competition, difference, change in a number of spheres" (Wei, 2011, pp. 1223-24) in developing his Japanese language competency and constructing his gender identity. In doing so, the possibilities were further explored and activated by his creativity and criticality.

9. Final Thoughts
	The contextual or functional view of language and the idea of producing reality in language learning implied in Travis' accounts fundamentally align with the notion of discourse. Discourse concerns "the production of meaning in social life" (Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001, p. 3). Recall, for instance, that Travis was able to feel breaking gender binarism in and after learning. Instead of the static view of language, as Takasaki (2004) argues above, and the deterministic way of language teaching, conceptualizing language and language teaching-learning from the discourse perspective would create opportunities for queer learners to investigate and disrupt the processes of normalizing practices while exploring and actualizing possibilities of queer identity construction and developing their language abilities.

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