

Identity Construction in Interaction: International Students' Dynamic Use and Changing Perceptions of the Japanese First- Person Pronouns Ore, Boku, and Watashi

DOI: 10.26379/IL2020001_005

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Abstract

The expansion of global mobility has increased the number of people conducting their lives in an additional language, a key component of which is presenting themselves to others. This study focuses on processes of jointly accomplished identity construction found through discourse analysis (Gee 2014) of the participants' positioning (Davies/Harré 1990) in conversations between two advanced L2-Japanese-speaker undergraduate international students matriculating at a Japanese university and their L1-Japanese-speaker peers. This is done by examining their actual (audio-video conversation data) and perceived use (interview data) of the first-person pronouns *boku* and *ore*, which indirectly index masculinity (*ore* directly indexes coarseness, while *boku* directly indexes boyishness), and *watashi*, which directly indexes a neutral stance. Additionally, it investigates the participants' stated folklinguistic theories (Miller/Ginsberg 1995; Imai/Nojima/Okada 2012) – speaker-created lay theories of language – about the functions and indexical values of these pronouns that contribute to the participants' positioning.

Findings show that L2 Japanese speakers deploy first-person pronouns based on the situation to construct their identity in interaction. Participants stated that their pronoun choice was deliberate and based on their folklinguistic theories; however, they were not always aware of which pronoun they used.

These theories were (re)constructed based on the language socialisation of master narratives found in society, the participants' L2 education, L1 Japanese speaker informants, and the L2 speakers' experiences. The participants' processes of coming to differentiate pronoun-use were varied, non-linear, and on-going.

Keywords

identity construction, positioning theory, folklinguistic theories, Japanese first-person pronouns, L2 Japanese speakers