First-Person Pronouns in Japanese Language

From Normative Explanations to Actual Usage

Silvia Milicia

Master's Thesis in JAP4693 – Modern Japan

Asia and Middle East Studies

Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS)

30 Credits

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Abstract

Japanese language presents a wide range of first-person pronouns, all glossed into “I” in the English translation. This study focuses on the first-person pronouns w*atakushi, watashi, atashi, atai, washi, jibun, boku, ore,* and *uchi.* Traditional explanations categorize the usage of the first-person pronouns based mainly on biological sex, formality, and age. This study analyzes how Japanese first-person pronouns acquired their current meaning and how Japanese speakers select their first-person pronoun both in normative and in non-normative gender and sexuality groups. To answer these questions, this study analyzes previous literature in the field and my own results from a questionnaire conducted in Japan and an online survey. The results of the questionnaire and the online survey prove that there can be other factors not considered by traditional explanations which can be important for the choice of first-person pronouns. The factors that can play a role in the choice of Japanese speakers, in addition to biological sex, age and formality, can be the followings: relationship with the interlocutor, occupation, dialect, peer pressure, topic of conversation, how the speaker want to appear, one’s feeling of being masculine or feminine, and stereotypes attached to first-person pronouns. This study also emphasizes the need of including gender minority groups in further researches in this field.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

1. Introduction

1.1 Aims and Scope

In this thesis I investigate the usage of first-person pronouns in Japanese language, both in normative and in non-normative sexual and gender identities. I became interested in this topic because contrary to English and other Indo-European languages, Japanese language presents a wide range of first-person pronouns. The first-person pronoun in Japanese is not fixed, but rather can change throughout the day or even within a conversation. The choice of the first-person pronouns is important for Japanese speakers, because depending on the first-person pronoun they choose, they will send a different image or impression, as all first-person pronouns are attached to some stereotypes and change their meaning depending on who is the interlocutor. We have traditional explanations that divide the first-person pronouns based mainly on biological sex, formality, and age, treating Japanese first-person pronouns as relatively fixed and unchangeable. For example, they indicate that *ore* is an informal, masculine pronoun or that *watashi* is an informal, feminine pronoun. However, this linguistic practice can change also depending on other factors, such as gender identity, social status, power relations, social norms, stereotypes, relationship with the interlocutor or others. The gap between normative explanations and the diversity of the actual practice by Japanese speakers is what convinced me to conduct my research, hoping to give new insights on the usage of first-person pronouns in contemporary Japan.

Some recent studies tried to challenge the essentialist[1] idea of categories like men/women, heterosexual/homosexual and treat both gender and language as fluid and negotiable. This is a huge progress in the study of language, gender, and identity. However, there are still some weakness. First, these studies tend to treat groups of homosexual people as homogeneous, and secondly, they do not include gender minorities in their research, such as transgender people or the so called *Xjendā*, which is the Japanese expression for non-binary people[2].

1.2 Research Questions

This study has three research questions:

[1] For example, they challenge the idea that men and women speak differently by nature providing in-depth studies on linguistic norms and how speakers adhere or not adhere to them.
[2] "Non-binary" is an umbrella term which refers to individuals who identify as both men and women, as neither men nor women, a combination of both or beyond genders.

(1) How have the Japanese first-person pronouns acquired their current meanings?

(2) Which are the most important factors that play a role in the choice of the first-person pronoun for Japanese speakers, other than pre-given categories like biological sex, age, or formality?

(3) How do people in non-normative sexual and gender identity groups negotiate the relationship between the linguistic norms and their gender identity, their masculinity/femininity or sexual orientation through the choice of the first-person pronouns?

The first question is meaningful for my thesis because I believe that it is important to delineate the origin of the pronouns and their meaning changes in time in order to better understand their current connotations. The second question focuses on investigating which factors are relevant in the first-person pronoun choice. The third question aims at examining the first-person pronoun usage in non-normative gender and sexuality groups.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

In chapter 2 I will present self-referring terms in Japanese language. I will also address two main debates around first-person pronouns in Japanese language. The first debate addresses the interrogative of whether Japanese language should be considered having actual "personal pronouns" or not. The second debate regards the concept of relational self and absolute self. I will then analyze the development and the features of first-person person pronouns (e.g. *watakushi, watashi, atashi, atai, washi, jibun, ore, boku, uchi*), demonstratives and kinship terms in Japanese language.

In chapter 3 I will introduce the normative explanations of Japanese self-referring terms. I will address the gendering process of Japanese language which started in premodern Japan and continued until the modern period. I will introduce the normative explanations of the Japanese first-person pronouns and emphasize their limitation. Lastly, I will also discuss new approaches adopted in the Japanese language and gender field.

In chapter 4 I will present previous studies on Japanese first-person pronouns which show how the traditional explanations for the first-person pronouns usage, merely based on sex, age and formality, are not valid. In particular, I will discuss the researchers conducted by Miyazaki (2004), Abe (2004, 2010), Claire Marie (2008) and S. Okamoto and Shibamoto-Smith (2016).

In chapter 5 I will discuss my findings from a questionnaire conducted in Japan during my student exchange program at Waseda University as well as from an online survey regarding the usage

of first-person pronouns in gender and sexual minorities on the platform *chiebukuro* in Yahoo Japan website. The goal of the questionnaire is to get a better understanding on how the first-person pronouns are perceived and selected by young Japanese native speakers. The purpose of the second survey is to analyze the usage of the first person-pronouns by non-normative sexuality and gender minority groups.

Chapter 6 summarizes and concludes the thesis.

2. Self-referring terms in Japanese language

In this chapter I will firstly analyze two main debates around personal pronouns in Japanese language. The first debate addresses the interrogative of whether Japanese language should be considered having actual "personal pronouns" or not. I will consider Lyons (1997), Kuroda (1967), Hinds (1971) and Wetzel (1994). The second debate's subject is the self in Japanese language, in particular whether Japanese language has a relational self, or rather an absolute self. For understanding this debate, I will mainly consider Wetzel's "relational self" (1994) and the notion of an "absolute self" theorized by Hasegawa and Hirose (2005). Lastly, I will analyze the development and the features of the three main categories of self-referring terms in Japanese language: first-person pronouns (*watakushi, watashi, atashi, atai, washi, jibun, ore, boku, uchi)*, demonstratives and kinship terms.

2.1 Does Japanese language have personal pronouns?

In this paragraph I want to address the ongoing debate regarding whether Japanese language should be considered having personal pronouns or not. Some linguistics claim that Japanese language does not have personal pronouns (Lyons,1997; Kuroda,1967) based on the difference in the formal features between the personal pronouns in Japanese language and Indo-European languages. On the other hand, other linguistics (Hinds,1971 among others) conclude that Japanese language have personal pronouns mainly because of two arguments. The first argument addresses the difference from any other type of linguistics class in Japanese language. The second evidence is the presence in Japanese language of the forms *watakushi* ("I") and *anata* ("you") which refer to the speaker and the addressee only (Wetzel 1994:76).

2.1.1. Lyons (1977), Kuroda (1967)

Some linguistics claim that personal pronouns do not exist in Japanese language because Japanese self-referring terms do not behave in the same way as the personal pronouns in the Indo-European languages. First of all, personal pronouns in Indo-European languages are a closed set of words, whereas in Japanese language pronouns are not fixed nor limited. In fact, there can be more than one word used for expressing the same personal pronoun and this group of words is not fixed. For example, in English the singular first-person pronoun is "I" whereas in Japanese we can find many variations, such as *watashi, atashi, watakushi, wai, atai, boku, ore, uchi, jibun, kochira* and so

on. This characteristic applies also to other pronouns. For example, the singular second-person pronoun "you" can be expressed in Japanese by many words such as *anata, amae, kimi, kisama, otaku, sochira* and so on. As Wetzel (1994:77) points out, there is no criteria that establish which words can and which cannot be considered as personal pronouns in Japanese language. Therefore, Lyons (1977:641-643) concludes that Japanese languages lacks personal pronouns as such but addresses them as "vocative and referring expressions" and "special nominals".

Secondly, Japanese pronouns do not inflect to show grammatical function. Regarding this issue, Kuroda (1967) analyzes the formal features of Japanese first-person pronouns and concluding that Japanese language does not have personal pronouns. In particular, he analyzes the characteristic declensions and the position in the sentence of the pronouns. In Japanese language each pairs of the English pronouns I/me, she/her, he/him correspond to the only one term. These pairs can be glossed respectively with *watashi* (I/me), *kanojo* (she/her), *kare* (he/him), like in the following examples:

Watashi *ga* ***kanojo/kare*** *o yonda*
I called **her/him**

Kanojo/kare *ga* ***watashi*** *o yonda*
She/he called **me**

As shown in the examples, Japanese pronouns do not have characteristic declensions.

Thirdly, Japanese personal pronouns cannot be modified and behave like nouns. In fact, the position in a sentence is the same as the nouns and they can be modified as nouns:

Chiisai hito
The short man

Chiisai ***kare***
The short **he**

As a result of these formal features, Kuroda (1967) concludes that Japanese language does not have personal pronouns.

2.1.2. Hinds (1971)

Hinds (1971) argues that Japanese language has in fact a separate linguistics class of personal pronouns. In his opinion, the evidence for this claim is that Japanese personal pronouns have two distinguishing features that differentiate them from other nouns. The first feature is the pluralization of personal pronouns which he claims to be different from the case of the other nouns. For instance, Japanese personal pronouns need to have a suffix as *-ra* or *-tachi* in the plural. For example, *watakushitachi*, which derives from *watakushi* ("I") with the suffix *-tachi,* is the plural first-person pronoun "we". The same process is applied to the others personal pronouns. For example, *kare* is the singular male third-person pronoun "he" and *kare-ra* is the plural male third-person pronoun "they". These suffixes can be added to the other nouns, but it is not obligatory. For example, *kodomo* can be translated with kid or kids. Secondly, he claims that personal pronouns cannot be modified by demonstratives such as *kono* and *sono* like the nouns.

However, further research does not support Hinds' claims. As Wetzel (1994:78) points out, Japanese personal pronouns are not the only linguistic category which follow this pluralization. In fact, also personal nouns can have the suffix *-tachi* to indicate the whole family. For example, *Tanaka-san* can only be understood as a single person. In order to indicate more *Tanakas*, it is obligatory to use the suffix *-tachi*:

Tanaka-san Mr./Mrs. *Tanaka*
Tanaka-tachi *Tanaka* family

Martin (1975:1067) challenges Hinds' second claim demonstrating how also personal pronouns in Japanese language can be modified by demonstratives in sentences like *kono watashi mo* ("even this person who I am") or *sono kare wa* ("that he").

So, does Japanese language have personal pronouns? Or should we call them pronominal forms? In my opinion, the difference between the behavior of Japanese personal pronouns and English personal pronouns does not justify the argument of an absence of pronouns in Japanese language. Although it has been demonstrated that they do not meet the requirement of English pronouns nor they are used at the same extent, Japanese grammar books (Hasegawa, 2015; Iwasaki, 2006; Kaiser, Ichikawa et al, 2013) do treat Japanese language as having first-person pronouns. In fact, in every conversation in Japanese language there is a fixed difference between the speaker and the addresser, and the self-referring terms refer to the speaker only. Therefore, my conclusion

supported by the earlier mentioned Japanese grammar books is that there are personal pronouns in Japanese language. In the following paragraph, I will address this issue in the broader context of the "self" in Japanese language.

2.2 Debate regarding the "self" in Japanese language

In this paragraph I will investigate two different approaches regarding the "self" in Japanese language. The first approach treats the self in Japanese language as fluid, relational and context-dependent. According to this view, Japanese personal pronouns do not have a clear and fixed referring point, as it changes depending on the situation (Wetzel, 1994). The second view considers the Japanese language as having a clear and rigid "self". It challenges the previous consideration of Japanese language as "selfless" bringing evidence for the existence of a definite sense of self in the Japanese speakers which is separate from all the other people (Hasegawa and Hirose, 2015). These two claims are explained in the following sections.

2.2.1 *Uchi – soto* dimension: the relational self

Patricia J. Wetzel (1994:73) concludes that the key to understand the Japanese first-person pronouns is considering the concept of *uchi* and *soto*. *Uchi/soto* are considered the "major organizational focus for the Japanese self, social life and language" (Bester 1973:7). *Uchi (*内 or 家*)* literally means "home" and it refers to the in-group dimension. *Soto* (外) literally means "outside" and it refers to the out-group dimension. For example, in the context of a family, *uchi* refers to the family members and *soto* refers to all the people outside of the family. In the case of a company, *uchi* refers to the employee of the company including the employer and *soto* to all the people who are not affiliated to the company.

Wetzel (1994) claims that Japanese language boundaries between the individual and the group are not defined clearly as, for example, in English. Therefore, the Indo-European paradigm of the first, second and third person pronouns cannot describe well the Japanese first person because in Japanese language the "self" is not a fixed point, as the "other". Depending on the context, Japanese personal pronouns can change based on group boundaries because what actually matters is not the specific person but his/her position outside or inside of a group dimension. In other words, according to Wetzel's theory in Japanese language the center is not the "self", as for example in English, but a *uchi,* which is the group where you belong. The *uchi* does not have clear boundaries and it is not fixed as the concept of "I" in the Indo-European languages. *Uchi* can shift depending on the situation and on the relationships between the interlocutors. That is why "Japanese self" is said to be "situationally"

defined (Araki, 1973). Consequently, self-referring terms in Japanese do not express only the type of speaker but also the social elements, the vertical relationships and in-group-relationships/out-group-relationships between the interlocutors. These relationships are shown in many parts of Japanese language, like reference terms, politeness marking or through verbs of giving and receiving. The following examples illustrate the fluidity of boundaries between the self and the others through the choice of reference terms in the context of a company:

(1) a. **社長さん**はいらっしゃいますか。(OUT → IN)

Shachōsama/shachōsan irasshaimasuka?
Is the **president** in?

(1) b. **社長**はただいま外出しております。(IN → OUT)

Shachō wa tadaima gaishutsu desu.
The **president** is out.

In the first sentence (1a) a person outside of the company asks if the president is present in the office or not. (1b) is the answer from the secretary of the president to the question (1a). 社長, *shachō,* is the honorific title used to address the president of a company. In (1a) the noun "president" is followed by the suffixe *-san* whereas in (1b) the secretary uses only the title 社長 without any suffixes. It is also most appropriate to use an honorific verb like *irassharu*. These expressions in Japanese are added in order to express politeness and formality. The usage or the omission of these suffixes are contextual and dependent on the relationship between the self, the interlocutor and the person who is addressed in the conversation. In this case, the person in (1a) adds *-san* to the title "president" because the speaker is an outsider referring to a president in another company, therefore he/she needs to speak in a formal and highly polite register. The secretary (1b) answers addressing the 社長 without *-san* and use a humble verb *orimasu* even if she is her subordinate because she and the president are regarded as members of the same group when talking to a person nonaffiliated to the company.

The omission of *san* and the use of a humble verb emphasizes the membership of the same group. This example shows how the membership to a group comes before the individual person and how the "self" can shift from being the "subordinate" to the president, and therefore in a lower position to the president, to a "representative" of the company which is her *uchi*, therefore in the same

position as the president. The secretary's identity, words' choice and sense of self (1b) are dependent on her membership to the company.

2.2.2 The absolute self

Hasegawa and Hirose (2005: 219-251) challenge the view that sees "Japanese self" as relational and context-dependent, brining evidence of the existence of a Japanese absolute self. Their argument is based mainly on the development of the honorific system in Japanese language, Japanese linguistics characteristics (in particular the "psych predicates") and the process of acquisition of the relational self by Japanese speakers.

Firstly, the honorific system, which is the foundation of the "relational self", began in Late Old Japanese by members of the Japanese aristocracy living in Kyoto. Most dialects in Japanese language do not have honorifics/humble forms, except for the Tokyo dialect which was highly influenced by the Kyoto dialect (Shibatani, 1990: 123-126).

Secondly, they state that the theory of relational self is inconsistent with other Japanese language characteristics, such as *evidentiality* or accessibility to information. After analyzing the *psych predicates*, they conclude that the boundary between the self and others cannot be fluid. They state that "the Japanese language forces its users to delineate strictly between the self and all others by prohibiting phrases for expressing human feelings or mental activity when the speaker does not have direct access to the source". These predicates are called *psych predicates* and they are subjected to this restriction because they are used to describe the speaker only. For example, the verb 思う, omou, "to think", is a psych predicate. It can used to express the mental state only of the speaker, and not others', like we see in the following sentences (Hasegawa and Hirose, 2005:230):

(2) a. *Watashi wa haha wa byōki da to* ***omou***
I think my mother is ill

(2) b. *Haha wa byōki da to* ***omou***
I think my mother is ill (and not: My mother thinks she is ill)

(2) c. *Haha wa (jibun wa/ga) byōki da to* ***omotteiru***.
My mother thinks she is ill

The (2a) sentence has a quite straightforward structure: *omou*, "think", is the predicate of *watashi*, "I". In the second sentence (2b) *watashi* is not present and the overtly-present potential subject of *omou* is *haha*. However, this construction would be impossible because the subject of *omou* is *watashi* even if it is not explicitly written in the sentence. Therefore, *watashi* must be the suject. The auxiliary phrase -*tteiru* in (2c) is needed for a third person subject. This constraint is based on the accessibility of information. Hasegawa and Hirose point out however that the omniscient author of a novel can use psych predicates with third person subject because she/he has the direct access to a character's mental state. The following example (Hasegawa and Hirose, 2005:229) provides another evidence regarding how the psych predicates behave in Japanese language:

(3) a. *Watashi wa* ***samui***
I feel cold

(3) b. *Haha wa* ***samu****-gatte iru*
My mum is showing signs of feeling cold

The predicate *samui* (3a) can only describe the speaker and no others. In order to describe *haha* (the mother for the speaker) other expression must be added. In this case, *gatteiru* must be added.

Thirdly, the relational self is not a natural part of the Japanese language. The shifting self in the honorifics and humble forms according to the situation is not learned naturally, rather it is acquired through books teaching how to use honorifics properly and Japanese business training programs offered from the companies to the young employees.

In conclusion, I think that it is safe to say that Japanese language has a relational self as well as a clear absolute self. As Hasegawa and Hirose (2005:222-223) point out, the first approach which compared the "Western self" and the "Japanese self" is not only inconsistent, but also problematic. These two concepts assume that there is a uniqueness of the "self" in Japan, which is considered to be the opposite of the self in "the West". The notion of Japan having a less-developed concept of self is embedded both in an Orientalist tradition, a constructed idea of Japan theorized by the western scholars and in the narrative of "Japaneseness" or "Self-Orientalism", a narrative promoted by the Japanese government and scholars in the construction of a unified nation. The narrative of "Japaneseness" sees Western countries as societies to emulate, but also to condemn as extremely selfish and individualistic. These narratives built up in an opposed scheme us / them, which considered Japan as a less individualistic, self-less and group-driven society and the "West" as self-centered and individualistic. However, this narrative is not supported by Japanese linguistics. In fact,

as we saw in the previous analysis, Japanese speakers has a rigid sense of self which is a category clearly separated by all the others.

2.3 First Person-Pronouns in Japanese Language

The most common Japanese first-person pronouns are probably *watakushi, watashi, atashi, atai, washi, jibun, boku ore, boku, uchi.* They can all be glossed as "I" in English language. Traditional explanations claim that they are chosen mainly depending on the sex, level of formality and age.

2.3.1 *Watashi, Watakushi, Atashi, Atai* and *Washi*

Watashi, *watakushi, atashi, atai* and *washi* are different readings for the same character, 私. According to the *Gogen yurai jisho* (Etimological Dictonary)[3] until the first half of the Medieval Period *watakushi* was used in the meaning of "private" as oppose to "public". From the second half of the Medieval Period (1185-1573) *watakushi* started to be used as a first-person pronoun. *Watakushi* continued to be used as a noun, but its usage started to include the notion of individual or self, as opposed to the general public. Therefore, it started to indicate the first person (Ishiyama 2019:21-23). Nowadays it is used both by male and females, but in the *Kinsei* period (1550-1850) it was used mainly by females. When speaking informally, the "*ku*" in "*watakushi*" was omitted and it was used the more casual "*watashi*".

According to Miyazaki (2004:257), *watashi* is a plain feminine first-person pronoun. It is regarded as feminine or perhaps neutral term for self-reference, but definitely not masculine. According to Abe (2010:42), *watakushi* is used in formal situation and it is possible both for female and male. For this reason, it is possible to consider it as a gender-neutral pronoun. *Watashi* is also used by both male and female, but when used by a male the situation is always formal, whereas a female could use it both in formal and casual contexts.

According to the *Gogen yurai jisho* (Etimological Dictonary)[4], *atashi* and *atai* started to get popular from the Meiji Period (1868-1912). *Atai* was used mainly by kids and women from the pleasure quarters in Tokyo. According to Abe (2010), *atashi* is traditionally feminine, and casual. The word *atashi* comes from *watashi* without the first consonant "w" to make the pronoun ever more colloquial.

[3] http://gogen-allguide.com/

[4] http://gogen-allguide.com/

Atai is considered an informal feminine pronoun (Yamaguchi 2007:122). It comes from *atashi* without the sound "sh".

According to Miyazaki (2004:260), *washi* is considered to be a pronoun for old men.

2.3.2 *Jibun*

Jibun (自分) is considered as a non-standard first-person pronoun. According to the *Gogen yurai jisho* (Etimological Dictonary)[5], the carachter 分 *bun* originally meant "one's inherent nature" as in the word 本分 *honbun*, which means "one's ability". From ancient times, the word *jibun* was used to express the meaning of "myself". *Jibun* was first used as a reflective personal pronoun in the Medieval Period. In the Kansai area, it can be used both as a first-person pronoun like *watashi*, and as a second-person pronoun having the same meaning as *anata,* you.

According to Kanemaru (1997), *jibun* is considered as masculine form and a reflexive pronoun. Its use as a first-person pronoun appears relatively old-fashioned and is often associated with men in sports or in militaristic groups such as *Jieitai* (Self-Defense Army) or the police force. Nakamura (2010:48) says that it is popular in cheering groups and in sports communities. However, Abe (2010:43) suggests that it may be used for a much wider range of gender identities than his historical association may suggest, which is strictly male. In fact in her research conducted in lesbian bars, she interviewed a girl who told her that she used *jibun* because for her it is the most "neutral" first-person pronoun available. Another girl, when asked why she was using *jibun*, said that she did not want to sound too feminine using *watashi* or *atashi*, but at the same time she did not want to use masculine pronouns, like *washi*. To her, *washi* presents a more masculine nuance than *jibun*. Therefore, she used *jibun*.

2.3.3 *Boku* and *Ore*

Boku (僕) and *ore* (俺) are now considered both informal and masculine. *Ore* can also be considered as offensive (Yamaguchi, 2007:122).

According to Miyazaki (2004:260), *boku* is considered as a "plain"[6] first-person pronoun, whereas *ore* is "the other deprecatory" pronoun. *Boku* is basically differentiated by *ore* on the basis of masculinity, strength or power. Boys are supposed to use the plain form *boku*, while *ore* is

[5] http://gogen-allguide.com/

[6] Miyazaki considers *boku* as "plain", so it claims that is not associated with any stereotypes. However, this is not true, since any first personal pronoun is always associate with some kind of stereotype.

perceived as more aggressive and the most masculine pronoun. In his reasearch *ore* was considered as either *imadoki,* "trendy", or *erasō* and *ibatteru*, "arrogant". *Boku* was considered less masculine than *ore* and have a connotation as "weak boy" or "mama boy".

Nakamura (2010:47) conducted a research among university students in Nishinomiya city, Hoyogo prefecture in 2000 and 2006. She asked some male students which the most comfortable first-person pronouns were to use. In 2000, 6 of them answered "*ore*" and 7 of them "*boku*" as the most comfortable first-person pronouns for them. But in 2006, 12 of the same male students answered "*ore*" is the most comfortable while it drastically declined to only two of them for "*boku*". The results show that there is a tendency for young boys to use *boku*, and then starting to change it to *ore* as they grow older. However, even students who were using *ore* commonly when talking to a professor they would shift to *boku*, *watashi* or *jibun* in the Tokyo area that were considered more appropriate.

Both *boku* and *ore* have a complex linguistic history. According to the materials (Nakamura, 2014: 40-47), *boku* was not used as a first-person pronoun before the Meiji Period (1868-1912) in Japan. Before that the first-person pronouns available were *watashi*, *ora* and *ore*. Originally, the meaning of *boku* was "servant" and it was used in classical Chinese as an extremely humble self-referring term. This term, as every Japanese term, could have two readings: *kunyomi* and *onyomi*, the Japanized reading and the Chinese reading. It was common to read it as "*yatsugare*" using the *kunyomi* reading. *Boku* was firstly used as a first-person pronoun and read as "*boku*" (following the *onyomi* reading) in the so-called school boy speech (*shosei kotoba*), a type of speech used by young people who moved to Tokyo from all over Japan in order to receive higher education. In the last years of the Tokugawa shogunate the usage of *boku* spread from solely the intellectual class to many other people and it was used equally among the samurai class and the intellectual class. Eventually, these students became the leading intellectual class of modern Japan as politicians, government officials, professors or journalists. At that time also *boku* was used indistinctively by males and females. Later on, the female language was separated from the male language and the student speech (i.e. *shosei kotoba*) started to be considered as the male language. The elite class of the modern period raised their sons using the "schoolboy speech" as a model, considered the most desirable way of speaking. *Boku* became popular as first-person pronoun by the heros in fictions such as kids' novels, manga and drama for kids.

As mentioned before, from the Edo Period until the beginning of Meiji, *boku* was not used as a first-person pronoun. As a consequence to the entrance of *boku* in the "school boy speech", *ore* and *boku* came to an opposition. *Boku* became the first personal pronoun for the intellectual elite as *ore* was for the masses. *Ore* did not have a lower position itself, but it gained this nuance in comparison

to *boku*. *Ore* was understood as a more masculine and violent first-person pronoun. For example, in the emotional love songs it was used *boku*, and *ore* was used in the songs that dealt with manual work, wandering, solitude, drinking, success, morality and feelings (Nakamura, 2014:46). Thus, *boku* started to gain an impression of weakness or being childish, while ore referred to masculinity and strength, sometimes violent.

To summarize, the first-person pronoun *boku* was directly derived from the so-called "school boy speech". After its spread, *ore* started to be considered as the first-person pronoun for the illiterate class. Later on, it started to be used positively to express strong masculinity. In recent years, *boku* began to be considered as infantile and weak. According to Nakamura, (2014:48-49) in recent years *jibun* started to have the same position as *boku* in the Tokyo area.

2.3.4 *Uchi*

Uchi (内 or 家) originally meant "inside" or "home" and it considered as a non-standard first-person pronoun. According to Miyazaki (2004:260) *uchi* seems to be a newly created first-person pronoun in the Tokyo area. He said that even though he grew up in the city where he was conducting research, he had never heard of anybody using *uchi* as a first-person pronoun before. Of the seven mothers of students he interviewed, who were almost in their forties, not one realized that such a first-person pronoun existed. *Uchi* is regarded as less feminine and formal than *atashi*. When used as a self-referred common noun, it can also indicate the speaker's family members (Yamaguchi, 2007:125).

3.2 Demonstratives and Japanese kinship terms

Demonstrative such as こちら (*kochira*, here) or こっち(*kocchi*, less formal than *kochira*) as can be used to refer to the first person (Yamaguchi, 2007:125). Throughout its history, Japanese language has always used demonstratives to refer to the self and the addressee as a way of indirect reference (Ishiyama, 2019:48).

In addition to demonstratives and personal pronouns like *watashi*, also common nouns can be used to refer to the first person. These nouns are called kinship terms. Kinship terms used as self-referring nouns which indicate the relationships between the interlocutors. For example, in the following example taken from 日本の歴史　*Nihon no Rekishi* "Japanese History" (Shueisha, 1982, p. 80, Vol.18) edited by Kasahara the mother refers to herself as 母, *kāsan*, "mother" when she is with her children:

母さんは二度と戦争はごめんだよ

Kāsan wa nido to sensō wa gomendayo

In this example the kinship term *kāsan*, mother, indicates the relationships between the family members (Yamaguchi, 2007: 142-146). Others kinship terms used in the family context are *otosan* (father), *oniichan* (big brother), *oneechan* (big sister), *obaachan* (grandmother), *ojiichan* (grandfather) and so on.

Others are *hissha* (author) and *sensei* (teacher). *Hissha* can be used in novels by authors. *Sensei* as a first-person pronoun can be used by teachers when talking to students, especially in elementary or middle school. *Sensei* can also be used by doctors when talking to a kid patient.

3.3 Conclusion

In the first chapter I tried to answer the question: "Does Japanese language have personal pronouns?". Considering Lyon (1997), Kuroda (1967), Hinds (1971) and Martin (1975). I concluded that Japanese language has a different category of self-referring terms which can be considered first-person pronouns. Even though Japanese personal pronouns have different formal features compared to those in the Indo-European languages, I concluded that Japanese language appears to have personal pronouns for mainly two reasons. Firstly, Japanese language requires a clear difference between the speaker and the addresser. Secondly, self-referring terms in Japanese language can only refer to the speaker.

In the second paragraph I addressed the subject of the self and the complex relationship with the context in Japanese language. This complexity arises because according to some scholars in Japanese language the "self" and the "other" are not fixed points, differently form the "I" in the Indo-European languages (Wetzel 1994:74-75). That is why some linguistics argue that it is actually incorrect to state that Japanese language has "first-person pronoun" in the first place and that the key to understand the self-referring terms in Japanese language is the in-group dimension and out-group dimension (respectively *uchi* and *soto* in Japanese language)(Wetzel:77-78). However, as other scholars, like Hasegawa and Hirose (2005), point out, this approach which considers the self in Japanese language as merely relational is problematic. In fact, this concept is embedded in the narrative which sees Japan as a selfless and group-driven society and "the West" as individualistic and self-centered following a us/them mentality. Hasegawa and Hirose (2005) bring evidential that Japanese language has not a relational self, but an absolute self which is clear and fixed. They state that the boundary between the self and others cannot be fluid in Japanese language.

Thirdly, I introduced the most used first-person pronouns in Japanese language (w*atakushi, watashi, atashi, atai, washi, jibun, ore, boku, uchi*).

Watakushi is the formal version of *watashi. Watashi* is used by females both in formal and informal contexts and by males in formal contexts only. *Atashi* is traditionally feminine and casual (Abe, 2010). *Atai* is considered an informal feminine pronoun (Yamaguchi, 2007:122). *Washi* is considered to be a pronoun for old men (Miyazaki, 2004:260).

Jibun is considered as masculine form and a reflexive pronoun (Kanemaru, 1997). It is often associated with men in sports or in militaristic groups such as *Jieitai* (Self-Defense Army) or the police force.

Boku and *ore* are both considered male and informal. They differ in terms of masculinity, strength and power. *Ore* is regarded as more masculine and aggressive, whereas *boku* is considered milder, like a pronoun for young and good boys.

Uchi is regarded as less feminine and formal than *atashi* (Yamaguchi, 2007:125).

Lastly, I introduced other categories of self-referring terms in Japanese language. Demonstrative such as こちら (*kochira*, here) or こっち(*kocchi*, less formal than *kochira*) and kinship terms such as 母 (*kāsan*, "mother") can also be used as self-referring terms in Japanese language.

3. From Normative Explanations To New Approaches in the Study of Japanese First-Person Pronouns

In this chapter I will discuss the normative explanations of the Japanese first-person pronouns as well as the new approaches adopted in the Japanese language and gender field. In the first paragraph I will address the gendering process of Japanese language which started in premodern Japan and continued until the modern period. The premodern ideas on how women should speak played a critical role in the social and linguistic narrative during the modern period. Later on, I will introduce the normative explanations of the Japanese first-person pronouns and emphasize their limitation. In the last section of the chapter I will investigate the new approaches in this field of research which tried to overcome the homogenous, binary essentialist explanations adopted by the research in the 1970s and 1980s aiming to a new understanding of Japanese first-person pronouns. This is crucial to my studies since it is important to analyze and discuss the ideas presented by the previous researches which saw language as a fixed and binary phenomenon in order to understand the new directions and possibilities in the Japanese language and gender field regarding the study of the first-person pronouns.

3.1 Gendering process of Japanese language

3.1.1 Premodern Japan

As Okamoto (2018:680-682) mentions, linguistic gender norms in Japanese language existed in the premodern times, focusing mainly on women's language use. There are evidences from the Heian Period (794-1185) in the form of diaries or stories which prove that there were certain expectations on how women should speak. For example, they were expected to speak gently in a quiet voice and reserved manner, to use *kana* syllabary and *wago* (Japanese alphabet and Japanese origin-words), rather than *kanji* and *kango* (Chinese characters and Sino-Japanese words). There are many conduct manuals and ethics book for women written the Edo Period (1603-1867). They often include the term *fugen* (women's language) and they give specific linguistics instructions. For example, women should use *wago* rather than *kango*, the polite prefix *o-* and should speak in a reserved and gentle manner.

3.1.2 Modern Japan

It has been argued that modern Japanese women's language is a product of Japan's modernity totally disconnected from the ideas regarding Japanese women's language in the premodern period (Inoue 2002:410-411). However, Okamoto and Shibamoto Smith (2016:216-224) argue that women's modern language is a result of a complex process in which modern ideology and the premodern ideology of femininity converged in the same narrative. Nakamura (2014:101) analyzes modern school moral textbooks and conducts book for women and argues that the narrative discoursed from the late nineteenth to the twentieth century reframed the premodern norms of feminine speech. In other words, premodern ideas of women's language were reframed within the modern ideologies of gendered nationalization. *Joseigo* (women's language) in the modern period is still regarded as polite, gentle and elegant. As Nakamura (2014) mentions, the gendering process in the post war period in Japan reflected the social role that men and women were given starting from that period. Women were regarded as "good wives and wise mothers". Men and women were claimed to have different social responsibilities but symmetrically fundamental for the benefits of the maintenance of Japanese traditional values. This concept is well expressed by Shimizu (1962:503): "Men and women are equals and they have the same rights. But in a family, they each have their own duties. Women have the duty of wife at home. Men have their jobs […]. They should keep their own duties and that does not impede equality between the sexes". Similarly, it was promoted the idea that men and women were supposed to own two different linguistics genres. Following a binary scheme, women's language was essentialized and considered as the expression of the "natural" women's femininity. As Ishiguro (1943:224) argues: "The origin of women's language is her sex. So, any female language from any country will have pronunciation, vocabulary and usage different from men's language". In other words, Japanese language was understood as having two kind of genres: *onna kotoba* or *joseigo* (women's language) and *otoko kotoba* or *danseigo* (men's language). In contrast to *joseigo*, men's language was regarded as the standard and normal status of the national language (Nakamura, 2014:101).

3.2 Normative explanations of Japanese first-person pronouns

3.2.1 Earlier studies in Japanese Language and Gender

The studies in the field of Japanese language and gender in the 1970s and 1980s were based

on the sexes dichotomy previously illustrated. Since the scholars took for granted that men and women spoke *differently*, they searched for gender and sex differences in language. The prerogative of these researches was that the sex of the speakers determines how she/he speaks. This difference could be encountered in various linguistics aspects. Firstly, in the usage of polite and honorifics expressions which was considered as part of women's language. Secondly, in the usage of sentence-final particles: *wa* was considered "female language", whereas *ze* was considered male language. Thirdly, in the usage of personal pronouns, for example, women were claimed to use *watashi* and men *ore* and *boku*. The reason for the difference was the sex, which was believed to influence and shape their linguistic choices (Abe, 2010:2).

One example of this approach is the study of Kumiko Takahara titled "Female speech patterns in Japanese" published in 1991 in the international Journal of Sociology of Language. The article investigates linguistic features of "Japanese women's language" in the pronominal system, verbal endings, modal and gender makers. Takahara's main research question is: "How do women speak differently from men?", using a binary comparison between men and women as her methodology. The idea behind her statements is that there are fixed linguistics features that are considered to be used exclusively by women (Inoue, 2006:14). From the very introduction we can see the approach towards female language, which is considered as a unique and timeless feature of Japanese language. In fact, she states that the paper will deal with the "rather unique linguistic characteristics of Japanese female speech" (Takahara, 1991:62). She continues making assumptions and generalizations on how women as a whole speak: "women tend to use tag questions instead of declarative statements, to use indirectives rather than commands, to use euphemism to avoid strong remarks, to appear uncertain rather than argumentative, to use exaggeration to please the address, and so on" (ibid:61).

These characteristics of a "female speech" are discussed in comparison to the male counterpart, reinforcing the idea that men and women behave and speak naturally different since each of the group is seen as internally homogenous. Throughout her research, she makes statements such as "women use tag questions more often than men in English"(ibid:67), "in comparison with male speech, the women's interrogative is generally impoverished in structure as well as in varieties"(ibid:74) or "the language of women is for female speakers, but the language of courtesy is for all within the Japanese speech comunity"(ibid:84). Takahara treats each social category, such as "men", "women" and "Japanese" assuming that they are internally homogenous, fixed, are pre-given.

In short, earlier studies in Japanese were problematic because they tried to correlate different speech styles with gender variables taking for granted the male/female dichotomy. This approach

imposes gender categories as something pre-existent and the only reasons to justify why a certain person chooses particular speech styles.

3.2.3 Normative Usage of First-Person Pronouns

As I explained briefly, Japanese first-person pronouns were considered to be used differently by men and women following a fixed and binary scheme. In fact, normative explanations claim that they are chosen mainly depending on the sex, level of formality and sometimes age. Most Japanese grammar textbook follow still this scheme (Hasegawa 2015, Iwasaki 2013, among others):

Style	**Adult (male)**	**Adult (female)**
Formal	Watakushi, Watashi	Watakushi
Normal	Boku	Watashi, Atashi
Informal	Ore	ø

Even though there are a wide range of pronouns in Japanese language, only *watakushi*, *watashi*, *atashi*, *boku*, and *ore* are considered. *Watakushi* is considered a formal pronoun that can be also used by both men and women. *Watashi* is considered as a pronoun used by men in formal situation and by women in both formal and informal situation. Except for *watashi* and *watakushi*, every other pronoun is considered to be either male or female. *Atashi* is considered as a not formal personal pronoun. *Boku* is considered as a plain male pronoun. *Ore* is considered as an informal male pronoun. Other studies may treat *atashi* as informal or *boku* as both plain and informal. However, this representation does not reflect the actual usage of personal pronouns in Japanese contemporary language. Following studies try to investigate the actual practice which is more complex and diverse compared to the normative explanations.

3.3 Towards new approaches in Japanese language and gender field

The approach of the earlier studies treats the usage of first-person pronouns as fixed and unchangeable. They also treat the category of "sex" as fixed, since they do not consider "gender identity" as a dimension relevant to the linguistic practice. However, there is an actual different between biological sex dimension and gender identity dimension. The acknowledgment of this difference establishes the new wave of research in the language and gender field.

3.3.1. “Sex” and “Gender” in linguistic studies

In the 1990s, the approach towards language and gender was reconsidered due to the development of gender and queer studies in many fields of research. These studies analyzed the difference between biological sex and gender identity.

Sex is a biological construct that encapsulates the anatomical, physiological, genetic, and hormonal variation that exists in species (Johnson and Repta, 2012). Previous conceptions of sex assumed chromosomal arrangements XX and XY as the typical makeup for women and men, respectively, while we now understand that chromosomal configurations XXX, XXY, XYY, and XO exist, as well as XX males and XY females (de la Chapelle, 1981; McPhaul, 2002). The ways we parse the categories *male*, *female*, *intersex*, and *other* are not biologically inherent but relative to place and time. Different cultures conceptualize sex variation in different ways, and our understandings of sex have changed over time (and continue to change) as biological variation is discovered and measurement techniques are refined. For example, procedures for assessing babies' sex at birth have evolved in recent years, particularly in the wake of the intersex movement that actively advocates for those whose reproductive or sexual anatomy is not clearly male or female, and can now include genetic and chromosomal reviews in addition to visual assessment of the genitals (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). Furthermore, in the space of a few decades, the treatment of inter-sex bodies has changed; assignment surgery at birth (where genitals and secondary sex characteristics are made to look male or female) is no longer widespread due to controversy over the physical, emotional, and sexual harm it can cause (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). In the past, at the time of birth surgeons performed cosmetic genital surgeries on intersex children without their consent. Endocrinologist manipulated patients’ hormones to getting the body to look either male or male.

According to Nielsen (2017), gender identity refers to the way one thinks consciously about oneself as gendered. In other words, it is the subjective meaning and feeling of one’s gender in terms of masculinity or femininity (Nielsen, 2017). The development of one’s gender identity is influenced by both inner feelings and social pressure. Individuals' inner feelings impact how people present themselves as a man, a woman, or another gender (Whittle, 2006). Social pressure might constrain their behavior based on what they experience as acceptable for their given gender (Johnson and Repta, 2012).

Gender identities can be classified as normative or non-normative. Normative (or conforming) gender identity refers to people who are assigned the biological sex “male” at birth and they identify as “men”

and to people who are assigned the biological sex "female" at birth and they identify as "women". Non-normative gender identities (or non-conforming) refer to "genderqueer" people or "transsexual" people. "Genderqueer" concept is very broad and include for example these categories: 1) people who identified as both man and woman (bigender) 2) neither man nor woman (agender), 3) people who move between two or more genders (gender fluid), 4) third gendered or other-gendered (having a non-binary identified gender) (Richards et al, 2016:95-96). "Transsexual" people are individuals who experience a discrepancy between a person's psychological gender and the morphological, biological and social sex which is often perceived as "non-self" and belonging to the opposite sex (Leinung et al, 2013:644).

In the new wave of studies language is not treated as something "fixed" or "natural", but changeable and negotiable, just as the gender identity. The new studies from the 1990s find useful to investigate how Japanese speakers negotiate the gendered language norms, which are the way that men and women are expected to talk in the society. Speakers are considered to have multiple identities and to negotiate them in different contexts or even in the same speech through different language use. These studies expected that gender is not always attached in a normative way to a person based on their sex. These studies tried not to treat categories as homogenous. For example, if they investigate about women, they specify which group of women they are talking about, such as, stay-at-home mothers, workers; urban or rural; married, divorced or single; educated or not, and others. They did non reinforce the essential category of "women" or "men" as two binary opposite (Abe, 2010). This new approach towards sex and gender enabled new scholars to include in their research speakers that fall outside of the "normative" patterns, including a much wider group of Japanese speakers with non-normative gender identities and sexualities.

3.3.2 New directions in the study of Japanese first-person pronouns

The new scholars started to consider that speakers have a wide number of identities that can emerge depending on the context. All speakers' identities are always present in every communicative interaction and identities can vary depending on the topic, the interlocutor, or goals of the speaker. In addition to this, the identities are not fixed but can change during one's life (Meyerhoof, 1996).

Following this theory, it can be argued that other factors could influence the choice of personal pronouns, such as the social background, profession or education (for example being a student or an employee), the dialect, or the membership to a particular organization, such as the yakuza, a farmer or an artist, because they are rooted in the speaker's identity. Gender identity started to be also an important factor. One of the new concepts that was applied in language and gender field

was “indexicality”, theorized by Irvine and Gal (2000:35-83). Indexicality indicates the process by which a way of using language express culturally recognizable identities. As a consequence, a speaker might use a type of language which communicates a specific ideological meaning associated with their gender. Apart from gender identity, also gender expression started to be considered important in the linguistic practice. Gender expression is how one communicates gender through behavioral and other overt cues, such as attire, hair style, body posture, mannerism, language and voice (A. Sloan et al, 2014:141). Lastly, the correlation sexual identity and the usage of personal pronouns started to be investigated in the language and gender field. Non-normative sexual identities refer to the identities of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and those identifying as transgender or transsexual, as well as those identifying as queer (a broad term for a wide range of non-normative sexual and gender identifications) and intersex (Gray, 2016:1).

In addition to biological sex, gender identity, gender expression and sexual identity, and I argue that also masculinity and femininity can play an important role in the choice of the first-person pronouns. The terms masculinity and femininity refer to traits or characteristics typically associated with being male or female, respectively. Traditionally, these two dimensions were understood as being polar opposite and fixed categories, where one category excludes the other (masculinity implies the absence of femininity and vice versa). However, recent studies started to treat masculinity and femininity as more fluid, theorizing that it is possible for an individual to have both male and female attributes at the same time. This new approach does not attach traits, such as strength or independence, to a particular type of body or biological sex. Masculinity and femininity are theorized as a range of behaviors, practices, and characteristics that can be taken up by anyone (Johnson and Repta, 2012). Conceptualizing this new approach, in the 1970s the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) was introduced. According to this scale, people may be classified as feminine (high femininity, low masculinity), masculine (low femininity, high masculinity), androgynous (high femininity, high masculinity), or undifferentiated (low femininity, low masculinity) (Baumeister and Vohs, 2007:545). My theory suggests that one may perceive oneself as female or male and have attitudes, feelings, and behaviors related to that perception (gender self-concept) without necessarily possessing a secure sense of one’s femaleness or maleness (gender identity). Furthermore, individual men and women may shun societally prescribed gender roles and still have a strong gender identity. In other words, they may define their masculinity and femininity in a variety of other way.

3.4 Conclusion

Before and during the postwar period, scholars used premodern ideas of femininity and gendered language as the fundament for the reinforcement of feminine linguistic norms (Nakamura, 2014). In the modern period, men and women expected to be opposite and have complementary roles in the modern society. This idea of a binary society composed by two different and opposed sexes/genders was proposed also in the linguistic discourse. The idea was that the biological sex determines linguistic practice (Abe, 2010:2). Consequently, the language was considered fixed and static. This approached was maintained in the study of the first-person pronouns. In fact, normative explanations claim that first-person pronouns are chosen depending on sex, level of formality and sometimes age. The first-person pronouns were divided according to a binary and fixed scheme. However, following studies consider also other factors as crucial to the choice of the personal pronouns. The watershed between these two approaches is the distinguishing between biological sex and gender identity. Language is now considered to be performative and changeable as our gender identity. Since language is no longer considered fixed an unchangeable, also the usage of first-person pronouns started to be investigated as a fluid process which does not follow a rigid scheme. Consequently, Japanese speakers could use two different first-person pronouns, such as *watashi* and *boku*, in the same context and to the same interlocutor, or shift among different speech styles (Abe, 2010:4). In other words, level of formality, biological sex and age were no longer considered the only criteria behind the choice of first-person pronouns. In addition to biological sex, gender identity, gender expression and sexual identity were introduced as other factors in the study of the language practice. I argued that there is a fifth category which is crucial to the choice of the personal pronouns, which is masculinity and femininity. Masculinity and femininity are understood as fluid categories that are on a spectrum. Our intern feeling of masculinity and femininity as well as our society's understanding of them could shape our linguistic practice.

In the next chapter, I will discuss some recent researches which take distance from earlier studies and establish a new wave in the study of Japanese first-person pronouns, trying to overcome the linguistic binary system and considering language as performative.

4. Previous Studies on Japanese First Person-Pronouns Usage

In this chapter I will present previous researches on Japanese first-person pronouns. Even though the studies that I selected are different in terms of methodology, target and writing style, they have a fundamental goal in common: they want to explore real language usage, collecting data from real-based contexts. They all bring new insights on Japanese sociolinguistics rejecting the taken-for-granted social and linguistic binary norms which define how men and women should speak. Taking into account the social and linguistic norms, they explore how Japanese speakers negotiate them in different real-based contexts giving an image of Japanese language as fluid, performative and changeable. In this sense, they differ from Japanese language and gender studies from the 70s and 80s, which were based on the sexes dichotomy: they searched for sex/gender difference in language, reinforcing the essentialist notion of "gender order".[7] The studies that I present succeed in presenting the usage of Japanese language and the first-person pronoun usage as diverse and more complicated than the traditional explanations describe. Rather than asking, "Which first-pronoun do women in Tokyo use?" they take a step further saying: "What does the usage of the *boku* or *ore* as the first-person pronoun by a woman produce/suggest?". Starting with the right questions, they lead to a new path in the research of Japanese language and gender.

4.1 Miyazaki's Study on Japanese Junior High School Girls' and Boys' First-Person Pronoun Use

In his research, Miyazaki (2004) conducted a longitudinal ethnography from 1997 to 2001 in a Japanese junior high school near Tokyo, focusing on untraditional first pronoun usage. He observed various class activities at school and conducted interviews with students in individual and group settings. The data show not only that the students did not always follow the binary linguistic norms (for example, some girls use *ore*, *boku* and *uchi* and some boys *atashi* or *ashi*) but also that some of them use unusual pronouns (*atai*, *oira*, their full names, their first names and their first names plus the informal suffix - *chan*) and invented pronouns, such as *mii*, which comes from the English pronoun *me*. According to the interviewers' analysis, the internal dynamics of the *gakkyu* (class) represents the main reason to negotiate the first-person pronouns. For example, one boy said he had

[7] According to Connel (1987), the notion of gender order refers to two norms. The first one implies that people should follow the binary gender order: people are either male or female according to their biological sex. The second idea is that men and women are "naturally" attracted to the "opposite sex" reinforcing the notion of heteronormativity, the expectation to have a heterosexual preference.

used *boku* in elementary school because he was weak, but in junior school he starting to use *ore* since he got close to Haruki, the leader of the group. Another boy explains that he uses *boku* to Haruki but *ore* in front of Hide, whom he considers equal. He avoids using *ore* among the most powerful students because he is scared that he could sound too arrogant and therefore they might try to get revenge on him.

The second part of his research consisted in a metapragmatic examination of the usage of the first-person pronouns. In other words, he investigated how the students perceived the usage of their language. Girls considered *watashi* too formal for situations other than *sakubun*, writing assignments, or presentations in class. The perception of *atashi* was not uniform. Many girls considered also *atashi* as too formal or too feminine for informal settings. Others considered *atashi* as not an indicator of femininity, but as a "normal girls' pronoun". When used by a boy, *atashi* was considered an index of homosexuality/transsexuality. *Uchi* was generally regarded as less feminine than *atashi*, and many girls preferred to use among friends because it is a shorter pronoun and easier to say compared to *atashi*. *Ore* is considered more "cool" or arrogant than *boku*, which has a connotation of weakness. Girls' use of *boku* and *ore* generally did not cause any negative reactions.[8]

This study shows convincingly how language usage goes beyond the male / female fixed categories given by the linguistic norms. It also proves how there are other important factors that play a role in choosing the first-person pronouns than merely sex, formality and age, such as power relations and in-groups dynamics. However, he does not provide a detailed explanation on why some girls decide to use *boku* and *ore*, as well other first-person pronouns. He explained the usage of first-person pronouns mainly in terms of in groups dynamics, and he does not consider gender identity or gender expression in his analysis.

4.2 Study on Female Speech in the Japanese Queer Community

Abe (2004) investigated the linguistic features in lesbian bars in Shinjuku, a ward in Tokyo known for its nightlife. In this research it is particularly relevant the case of a young employee in her early twenties who used *jibun* as a personal pronoun. She said that she used this term because *watashi* and *atashi* express too much femininity, but at the same time she did not want to use *boku* or other standard male pronouns because, as she states, "she perceives herself as a woman and not as a man".

[8] Miyazaki explains that these girls who were using *ore* were perceived by their classmates as very powerful, so the other students did not oppose them. In addition to this, he indicates that the pronoun *boku* was regarded as considerably less masculine than *ore*. When used by boys, it was considered as a pronoun for "weak" boys. As a consequence of this perception, girls' usage of *boku* did not trigger any negative reactions.

For her, *jibun* is the most neutral pronoun if one wants to be simply oneself. However, when a friend called her at work, she shifted the first-person pronoun from *jibun* to *ore,* a standard masculine pronoun. When asked the reason of this shift, she answered that because it was a private and emotional conversation, she preferred to use *ore* since she perceived *jibun* as too formal. In short, she uses a standard masculine pronoun in the private sphere and a more gender-neutral pronoun in the public context. Unfortunately, Abe does not give us any explanation regarding why she uses *ore* in *uchi*-communication (while speaking to her friend) since she has said previously that she does not use a masculine linguistic speech. The reader is not informed about the reason why she chose specifically *jibun* and not *watashi* in her *soto*-communication. Abe does not provide an in-depth analysis of how the woman perceives *jibun* and why she feels that it is the best way to express herself. In my opinion, she probably uses *jibun* because she does not want to display through her speech neither femininity nor masculinity and she perceives *jibun* as not having a strong feminine nor masculine intrinsic connotation. The fact that she uses *ore* in *uchi*-communication might indicate that her real identity is more masculine rather than feminine.

Abe interviewed another lesbian-identified young woman working in a company. In this case, she uses a standard feminine pronoun in the private sphere and a standard masculine pronoun in the public sphere. She uses *boku* with her boss who suspected of her homosexuality, even if she uses *atashi* in everyday life. She justifies this choice saying that she uses *boku* while speaking to her boss in the office to make "a false sense of power". Using *boku*, she could situate herself at the same level of the boss and that is something that she could not do using a feminine pronoun. This means that her usage of the first-person pronoun *boku* does not reflect her actual gendered identity, but it is a performance with a specific goal. Indeed, she did not use the first-person pronoun *boku* because she felt it was the right pronoun to express herself, but she chose it to gain power in the eyes of the boss and reach the same position. This choice was not influenced solely by power relations in the office, but also by linguistic and social norms as well as the stereotype regarding lesbian speech. She chooses to use *boku* because it is a masculine pronoun according to linguistic norms, therefore used by men. That could reflect her perception of binary gender roles in the Japanese society: men and women have not the same power in the business context, consequently men's language is more powerful than women's language in the business world. She hopes that the shift from women's language to men's language would make her appear as if she was in a business position equal to her boss. If men and women had been equal within the business world, there would not have been the need for changing the personal pronoun from a standard female to a standard male one. However, as she states herself, it is only a "false sense of power". In practical terms, this shifting cannot actually give her the same

social position as her boss as it cannot change the reality of interpersonal relationships and social dynamics. However, it helps her feeling more confident while speaking to her boss about business-related topics in the office. In addition to this, the fact that her boss probably knows about her homosexuality may have facilitated this shifting. In fact, there are strong stereotypes about lesbian who "act like men" or "speak like men". In this case the social stereotypes and the social stigma which sees lesbian as not "real women", therefore not speaking in a feminine speech, gives her the possibility to use a standard masculine pronoun without fearing a strong reaction or surprise from her boss. Similarly to the last case, Abe does not provide an explanation on why she uses *atashi* constantly outside of her work, both in *uchi*-communication and *soto*-communication.

Overall, I think that Abe's research manages to point out how the first-person pronoun can change based on different factors other than formality and biological sex. It presents first-person usage in Japanese language as a complex phenomenon which change not only depending on the context but also on the speaker's intentions and negotiation of linguistic norms. However, there are some weak points. Firstly, Abe describes the shift of their first-person pronoun without explaining in depth the change of the pronouns and their feelings behind this choice. For example, when the woman in the first case study changes her pronoun to *ore* talking with a friend, she does not explain the reason of this shift and this choice of pronoun. She does not provide any information on the use of *atashi* in *uchi*-communication neither in the second study. The reader can assume that she uses *atashi* because she normally presents herself as feminine, even though there are not explanations on that. Secondly, she treats the "lesbian" Japanese speakers as a homogenous category, without investigating the differences between women in this community. For example, she does not provide a description on their personality, their gender expression or if they consider themselves more on the feminine or on the masculine side. She talks about their homosexuality only, without providing any description of their different features, which probably could help the reader to understand the reasons behind certain choices and the complexity of the language shifting. Lastly, these are only two case studies and it is not an extended research. Therefore, it is not possible to understand deeply the use of first-person pronouns in the Japanese queer community based solely on this research.

4.3 First-Person Pronouns in *O-nē-kotoba*

Some previous researchers have focused on first-person pronoun usage in *O-nē-kotoba*. According to Abe (2010), *o-nē-kotoba* literally means "speech of older sister or woman" or "Queen's speech", a linguistic practice which emerged in the post war period. The definition established by some sociolinguistics is "a linguistic genre used by gay men in a performance of *hyper femininity*"

(Abe, 2010:77-78). Examples of *o-nē-kotoba* are sentence final expressions such as *wa, yo, no, kashira, mono*:

*Kore-wa hon-**yo*** (This is a book)

*Asu-wa ame-ga furu**no*** (It will rain tomorrow)

*Kare-wa kyoo kuru-**kashira*** (I wonder if he is coming today)

*Watashi, byooki-da**mono*** (Because I am sick)

Stereotypically, the usage of this speech style is considered as an index of male homosexuality (Maree, 2008:67). In this paragraph I will analyze three previous research from Abe (2010), C Marie (2008) and Okamoto and Shibamoto-Smith (2016).

4.3.1 Abe

Abe's (2010) main focus of research is the investigation on heterosexist gender norms negotiation by gender and sexual minorities in Japanese language. In her book "Queer Japanese: Gender and Sexual Identities through Linguistic Practices", she discussed a case on the usage of o-*nē-kotoba.* She decided to investigate this linguistic genre because it threatens the gender binary structure of the Japanese language, where every first-person pronoun is believed to belong to either male's speech or female's speech (except for *watashi* and *watakushi*, considered in some cases gender-neutral). She claims that the difference between male's speech and female's speech are a product of a heteronormative society.[9] Abe questioned the linguistic norm of this genre investigating the actual usage of o-*nē-kotoba* through interviews and recorded conversations in real-life situations. There are many characteristics of the *o-nē-kotoba* linguistic genre that can be analyzed, such as sentence-final particles or interjections. As for the first-person pronouns, we can find *watakushi, atakushi, watashi, atashi, tai* and *uchi*. However, no one of the gay men she interviewed used these pronouns consistently in their life. On the contrary, they use mainly standard male first-person pronouns. She interviewed a twenty-year-old college student (ibid.:144) and he said that he always tried not to use a first-person pronoun. If he is obliged to use a first-person pronoun, he used mostly *boku*, and not *ore* which seems too harsh. He says: "I don't think I'm rough enough to use *ore.* That's why I don't want to use *ore*. On the other hand, *boku* sounds too much like an innocent boy. That's why I don't like it". Finally, he added that he used *watakushi* when he wrote business mails. In this example we can see clearly that he considered the first-person pronouns as a tool to express his

[9] In her research Abe takes for granted that there is a strict division between male speech and female speech in Japanese language. However, this is not obvious and needs to be proved.

identity and to give different images of himself depending on the context. Abe explored also the difference between the usage of the first-person pronouns in *uchi* and *soto*. He stated that he tried to avoid using the first-person pronoun when talking in *uchi*-communication, but in the business world, *soto*, he shifted to a standard formal first-person pronoun. She interviewed also another young graduate student, Saturo, who claimed to shift between two forms: *jibun* and *watashi.* When Abe asked him, he answered that he never used *ore* because it does not reflect his gender identity[10]. After the inverview, she recorded a conversation between Saturo and a friend about different topics, like family or memories from childhood. Contrary to what he said in the interview, he used *boku* when talking about his family, and then he shifted to *jibun* talking about his bad experience in the elementary school when he was bullied because of his sexuality[11]. He used again *boku* in the rest of the conversation, but when talking about gay marriage and the parades he shifted again to *jibun*. Satoru considered himself as *jibun* because he is a gay man. So, he uses *jibun* when talking about sexuality-related topics. From her research's findings, Abe discovered that actually *o-nē-kotoba* is not popular among gay men in private life and that it was considered negatively among her interviewees.

4.3.2 Marie

The second study on *o-nē-kotoba* that I want to discuss is a research which contradicts *o-nē-kotoba* as a strictly gay male speech made by Claire Marie (2008). This study shows that this linguistic genre can be used also by women. Two participants of the discussion, lesbian-identified in their twenties, Oka and Sayuri, used the extremely feminine speech style (e.g. *o-nē- kotoba* speech style) throughout the interaction. They wanted to use this speech to avoid the socially expected feminine language[12], which is heteronormative, and at the same time the stereotypes of a boyish lesbian's masculine speech. So, what influence their choice is not only the perception of their own identity, but also the cultural expectation and the gendered norms of the Japanese language. As for the first personal pronouns, during the conversation Oka explained her personal experience. She said that in the past she used to call herself with *watashi* because it is gender-neutral. Then, she decided to shift to the more feminine pronoun *atashi*. She decided to use specifically a personal pronoun that

[10] Probably "gender identity" is not the right word to use in this context because he is not a transgender, therefore his gender identity is male. So, the issue is not that *ore* does not represent her gender identity, but rather how he perceives himself in terms of masculinity or femininity. He might consider *ore* too masculine for him.
[11] In my opinion, the expression "sexuality" does not represent the actual issue. In fact, he was bullied not because his friends in the elementary school thought he was gay, but because of his femininity.
[12] Marie claims that there a feminine language used by "real" Japanese women as opposed to the masculine speech used by "men". She claims that *o-nē-kotoba* speech is not the "normative female speech". However, she does not explain what kind of feminine speech she is referring to.

expresses a high degree of femininity because she wanted to compensate her "lack of femininity" in the way she presents herself to the society. She said that she decided to use the pronoun *atashi* so that everyone perceived her as a "woman" (*onna*). The reason for the choice of the personal pronoun is highly influenced by the society's stereotypes that lesbians are mannish and talk in men's language. In other words, since lesbians are expected to act "like men", she decided to break this stereotype using a feminine first-person pronoun even though she would prefer to use a less feminine one, like *watashi*. Thus Sayuri hypothesized that if Oka was heterosexual, she might not fear the stereotype and she would be able to use masculine first-person pronouns if she wanted to. Also, Sayuri's choice of the personal pronouns is influenced by the gendered norms. When she firstly formed a relationship with a girl in her teenage years, she started to use *boku*, a standard male form. However, now she uses *watashi* or *atashi* because she wants to avoid the typical mannish lesbian's stereotype too.

4.3.3 Okamoto and Shibamoto-Smith

S. Okamoto and Shibamoto-Smith (2016) examine talks from a variety show called *Sanma no Honto no Koi no Karasawagi* "Sanma's Empty/Gay Men's Fuss about True Love Affairs" (broadcast on April 13, 2011 and on August 23, 2011). The host was Akashiya Sanma, a 58-year-old man. Among the guests there were two heterosexual men, one heterosexual woman and ten gay *tarento* ("talents", "celebrities"). It is very common to find *onē* personalities or gay *tarento* in Japanese mainstream television variety programs, who use *o-nē-kotoba* in their public performance for entertainment. They focused mainly on the speech of Matsuko Derrakusu and Akashiya Sanma, the host. Matsuko Derrakusu is a cross-dressing gay *tarento*. He uses stereotypical feminine forms consistently, such as the hyper feminine first-person pronoun *atashi*. The authors conclude that the use of an exaggerated form of feminine speech may serve to indicate that Matsuko is not trying to become an "ordinary" heterosexual woman. The author concludes that he is not trying to become an "ordinary" woman because "ordinary" women do no use *o-onē-kotoba*. In other words: generally, no women in the real life would speak like Matsuko does (ibid.:283-291). Using highly feminine linguistic features persistently, he creates a feminine speech which is different from the normative linguistic genre that should be used by women in Japanese society. The authors notices that the language of gay *tarento* is quite different from their use of feminine speech in private interactions within the gay community. According to their research's results, the language of gay *tarento* is far from the linguistic style used ordinarily in the gay community, where the most prominent linguistic style was still masculine. In another show (*Go-ji ni muchū* "Immersed in five o' clock"), Matsuko used strongly masculine forms frequently. Therefore, the authors conclude that Matsuko's linguistic

style is used as a commodity for entertainment. It is modified and exaggerated in order to construct different personae for each situation.

4.4 Okamoto and Shibamoto-Smith's comprehensive study on Japanese Sociolinguistics (2016)

Okamoto and Shibamoto-Smith's book (2016) "The Social Life of Japanese Language" addresses the three main topics regarding Japanese sociolinguistics: the notion of standard language and local dialects, Japanese honorifics and Japanese language and gender. I will consider mainly the last part which comprehend chapter 5 and 6.

The purpose of chapter 5, "Gendered Japanese: Normative Linguistic Femininity and Masculinity" is to prove that there are bi-gendered norms aimed at a female audience explicitly through the education system and implicitly through the media. These norms assume a heteronormative frame. The term "heteronormativity" refers to the cultural expectation that people follow the binary gender order previously explained, which states that people are either male or female according to their biological sex, and that men and women are naturally attracted to the "opposite" sex. This includes beliefs of the gender roles within a heterosexual relationship, such as in the work sphere, dating life, family and language. (Jones, 2016: 211). In order to achieve their goal, they used the first half of the chapter describing the linguistic gender norms in the modern period from a historical prospective. They explore how the concept of "woman's language" was constructed through both official policies enacted by the Meiji government (1867-1912) and non-state actors, such as textbooks, magazines, women's conduct books and novels. They analyze also the scholarship discourses, which referred to women's language as an unique and fixed Japanese tradition emphasizing its politeness, gentleness and refinement. Regarding the first-person pronoun issue, they firstly analyze it in the context of *jogakusei kotoba* ("schoolgirl speech") which refers to a speech variety that schoolgirls were believed to have started using as a form of resistance to their *ryōsai kenbo*[13]-based education. It was considered vulgar, rough and impolite by the media, even though many of its features, like final-sentence particles, eventually became a feature of the stereotypical feminine women's speech forms. Among other features, schoolgirl speech was known for the use of the first-person pronoun *boku* appropriated from *shosei kotoba* ("schoolboy speech"), a linguistic variety that arose among elite boys in the higher levels of education during the Meiji Period. Contrary to *shosei kotoba,* Standard-Japanese based *joseigo* has *atashi* as the correct female pronoun.

[13] *Ryōsai kenbo* means "good wife, wise mother". It is an idealized role for women as wives and mothers.

The next chapter, "Gendered Japanese: Diversity in attitude and practice" considers the various way in which speakers negotiate or respond to what they consider the norms. They collected their data from various sources: online blogs, a survey, a face to face conversations and TV talks. The TV talks refer to the study on *ō-ne-kotoba* which I analyzed previously. The purpose of their survey with 108 respondents was to investigate the difference between linguistic femininity and masculinity in regional dialects. Their analysis show how speakers are neither completely conforming to nor completely ignoring linguistic gender norms. They use linguistic features depending on the interactional contexts, including local context, age, sexuality, the interpersonal relationship between speaker and interlocutor(s), the pragmatic work being done through particular speech acts and other social variables. Depending on the context, same linguistic forms may be interpreted differently. For example, *ore* (masculine first personal pronoun in Standard Japanese) used by heterosexual men might indicate masculinity as well as informality or friendship, when used by two heterosexual women from Yamagata where *ore* is used by both men and women might indicate friendship as well as their age and regional origin. It might refer to a break in the norms when used by young women, whereas used by gay *tarento* on TV talks may indicate their biological sex as well as their current role as an entertainer. They stress the importance of the concept of polyindexicality of linguistic forms in order to understand the relationship between norms and practice.

4.5 Conclusion

These studies show that how the traditional explanation for the first-person pronouns usage, merely based on sex, age and formality, are not valid. Treating both gender and the language as performative and changeable, they problematize pre-given and fixed concepts of "Japanese women/men" or "Japanese female/male speech". That enables them to include in the research speakers that fall outside the "normative" patterns, including a much wider group of Japanese speakers, for example gender and sexual minorities, and speech varieties which are not applicable to the normative linguistic binary, such as *ō-ne-kotoba.* They explain that the binary linguistic representation and categorization is a product of a heteronormative society. At the same time, they show how normative linguistic rules influence the speech, as well as as speakers' sense of selfhood. For example, the young male graduate student interviewed by Abe (2010), Saturo, said that he tried to avoid as much as possible the use of the first-person pronouns in the private sphere. That is because he felt that he did not fit in the binary structure of the Japanese language and society, but at the same time he did not use feminine first-person pronouns considered socially inappropriate for a man. Within a heteronormative system, non-normative sexual and gender identity groups feel the need to

hide their real identity, and it has consequences on how they speak (Lusing, 2004, p.105). Miyazaki (2004) shows how in the speeches analyzed the speaker's sense of gender and power-relations were combined together creating new meanings valid for a specific community and that this cannot be explained easily. Many factors (linguistic norms, speakers' sense of sexuality or gender, context, relationship between the interlocutors) convey in a creative and unexpected usage of language which goes beyond any cultural or sociolinguistic rules.

These studies tried to include non-normative sexual and gender identity groups. They mainly focused on non-normative sexualities, which refers to non-heterosexual people, such as lesbians, gay men, bisexuals. However, they rarely included non-normative gender identities. With the term "non-normative gender identity" I refer to genderqueer and transgender identities. "Transgender" is considered an umbrella term for non binary-identified gender identities but it tends to be associated with the binary identities of male and female: trans men are called FTM (Female to Male) and trans women are called MTF (Male to Female). "Genderqueer" concept is very broad and include for example these categories: people who identified as both man and woman or neither man nor woman (agender), people who move between two or more genders (gender fluid), third gendered or other-gendered (having a non-binary identified gender). Genderqueer identity is translated in Japanese language as Xジェンダー , *X jendā*.

The researches that I presented previously did not investigate how genderqueer and transgender groups negotiate the normative language speech and represent their gender identity through linguistic features.

Another weak point in all these researches is that they treat groups of gay people and lesbian people as homogenous. Clearly, they are not homogenous as we can see in the different pronoun choice: one lesbian woman uses *jibun* or *ore*, while the other lesbian woman uses *watashi*. However, this difference in their choices is not explained in the researches. My hypothesis is that the main factor behind the choice of the first personal pronoun in *uchi*-communication (where they can be themselves without hiding their real identity) is the perception of themselves as more feminine or more masculine. Therefore, I want to interview Japanese speakers, in particular in the queer community, and ask them which first-person pronouns they use, in which situation and the reasons why they chose them in order to find out what factor(s) influences the choice of the first-person pronoun(s). I want to include also non normative gender identities, such as transgender people and *X jendā* people.

5. Questionnaire and Online Survey

In this chapter I will discuss my findings from a questionnaire conducted in Japan during my student exchange program as well as from an online survey regarding the usage of first-person pronouns. From August 2018 to February 2019 I stayed as an exchange student at Waseda University (Tokyo, Japan) in the Graduate School of International Culture and Communication Studies. During that semester, I created a questionnaire regarding the usage of the first-person pronouns by Japanese native speakers. The goal of this questionnaire is to get a better understanding on how the first-person pronouns were perceived and by young Japanese native speakers. Even though we already have normative explanations as well as further research on the non-normative usage of first-person pronouns in the Japanese language, I was interested in gaining an insight on how these pronouns were understood and used by young Japanese speakers in Tokyo. Since language is performative and therefore can change at any time, I was hoping to discover new meanings and nuances attached to first person pronouns which could enlarge the attributes and definitions we have collected until now. I then decided to conduct an online survey which focuses only on analyzing the usage of first-person pronouns in gender and sexual minorities. The purpose of the second survey is to analyze the usage of the first person-pronouns by non-normative sexuality and gender minority groups. I used as the online platform *chiebukuro* in Yahoo Japan. It is an online forum where users can both ask and answer questions.

5.1 Questionnaire at Waseda University

My questionnaire was anonymous and conducted through an online form. I shared the link of the questionnaire personally through a QR code or through a link in a direct private message after having introduced myself directly or indirectly to the respondents, who were both university and high school students.

The university students were all studying at Waseda University and they were from three different classes. The first group was composed of some of my classmates in the linguistics seminar I was attended. This seminar was attended by master as well as Ph.D. students who had their dissertation related to linguistics. The second group was composed of students in the phonetics and phonology class at the bachelor level. The third group was composed of students in Japanese phonetics and phonology class at the bachelor level. My intention was to personally introduce myself to the students talking briefly about my background and politely ask if there were someone who was willing to answer my questionnaire for my research. I would then wait outside of the class and the

students willing would come and ask for the QR code or the link of the questionnaire. I gained access to the two classes at the bachelor level because the professor was my co-supervisor in Japan.
I was also interested in researching the usage of first-person pronouns at an even younger age to see what kind of changes in the understanding in the first personal pronouns were occurring. I was given the opportunity to share my questionnaire also to a group of high school students. I was able to do that because one of my classmates in the seminar was also working as a high school teacher and he was willing to share my research with those interested among his students. Thus, the youngest respondent was 17 years old and the oldest was 31 years old.

The questionnaire is divided in three section. The first section presents questions regarding personal information. The second section analyzes the first-person pronoun choice process. The third and last section is about the first-person pronoun usage and is composed by four questions. I conducted the survey in Japanese and the list contains the questions in the English translation.

First Section

Question 1 Select your gender, please.

Question 2 Write down your age, please.

Second Section

Question 3 Which factors are important when choosing the first-person pronoun? (more answers are possible)

Question 4 Is it hard to choose which first-person pronoun to use?

Question 5 Why is it hard?

Third Section

Question 6 Ordinarily, which first-person pronoun/pronouns do you use? (more answers are possible)

Question 7 Why did you choose this first-person pronoun? If you chose more than one, explain in which contexts you use them.

Question 8 Have you always used the same first-person pronouns? (e.g., when you were a kid, or a junior high school student)

Question 9 If your answer is no, write which first-person pronoun/pronouns you used in the past.

5.1.1 First section (Personal information)

The total number of respondents was 44, 30 female and 14 male. The youngest respondent is 17 years old and the oldest is 31 years old. The biggest group is 18 years old respondents (40%), followed by 19 years old group (9%) and 21 years old group (9%).

5.1.2 Second section (First-person pronoun choice process)

Most of the respondents indicate as the most important factor when choosing the first-person pronoun the relationship with the interlocutor, selected by 37 respondents (84.1%), followed by age

selected by 25 (56.8%) and biological sex by 24 (54.5%), 12 (27.3%) "level of formality and 11 people (25%) selected "occupation". The other factors indicated are "dialect" by 5 people (11.4%) and "sexual orientation" by only one respondent (2.3%).

	Factors	N = 44
1	Relationship with the interlocutor	37 (84.1%)
2	Age	25 (56.8%)
3	Biological sex	24 (54.5%)
4	Level of formality	12 (27.3%)
5	Occupation	11 (25%)
6	Dialect	5 (11.4%)
7	Sexual orientation	1 (2.3%)

Table 5.1: Factors for choosing first-person pronouns (note that the respondents answered more than one factor)

The vast majority of the respondents selected more than one factor that play a role in choosing the first-person pronoun. In fact, only 7 respondents selected only one factor. These results challenge the normative explanations provided by Japanese grammar books (Hasegawa 2015, Iwasaki 2013 among others). They provide age, biological sex and level of formality as the only three factors. Even though age (56.8%), biological sex (54.5%) and level of formality (27.3%) were indicated in the questionnaire as factors that can be taken into consideration in the process of choosing the first-person pronoun, also other factors like relationship with the interlocutor, occupation and dialect were considered important. Thus the results of my questionnaire show that there are more than three factors that play a role in choosing the first-person pronoun. Traditional explanations treat the first-person pronoun choice as fixed and unquestionable. However, the choice of the first-person pronoun is in reality changeable and negotiable depending on the context of conversation.

When the respondents were asked if the choice of the first-person pronoun was difficult, four addressed their struggle in choosing the right pronoun for them, as shown below.

Question 5: Why is it hard to choose the first-person pronoun?

"I don't know which [first-person pronoun] is the best to use on the first meeting with a person when the relationship is not established yet"

"I worry about the level of formality (if I should you *watashi* or *watakushi*)"

"I worry about what the other would think"

"[It is hard to choose the first-person pronoun] because I have to adapt it on the situation"

What emerge from the answers is that sometimes it is hard to understand how formal or informal a certain context is and therefore is it hard to decided which first-person pronoun to use. In addition to

that, one of the respondents admits that it is hard to choose the one she actually wants to use out of fear of judgement from the interlocutor.

5.1.3 Third section (First-person pronoun usage)

Table 5.2 provides the answers for the question: "Ordinarily, which first-person pronoun do you use?". I divided the respondents in male and female in order to be able to track non-normative usage of the pronouns. The first element that surprised me was the recurrent usage of *uchi* and the first name by females as the first-person pronouns, which are not considered by normative explanations (Hasegawa 2015, Iwasaki 2013 among others). *Wai* and *ware* are not also considered by normative explanations but appeared in the answers of the questionnaire. One female indicates that uses *ore* (considered masculine and informal) as the first-person pronoun.

	Female	Male	Total
Watashi	26	2	28
Ore	1	14	15
Uchi	10	x	10
Boku	x	8	8
Jibun	2	6	8
My first as it is	7	x	7
Atashi	5	x	5
Wai	2	x	2
Ware	1	x	1

Table 5.2: Ordinarily, which first-person pronouns do you use? (More answers are possible)

Question 7: Why did you choose this first-person pronoun? If you chose more than one, explain in which contexts you use them.

"I use *watashi* in a formal situation or with a superior, I use *ore* with friends, in difficult situations where I cannot decide between the two I use *jibun*" (Male, 31)

"I used *uchi* until I was a senior high school student but then I started to feel like it was too childish, so I switched to *atashi*" (Female, 21)

"I use *uchi* in formal situations and *watashi* in casual settings" (Female, 20)

"I use *watashi* because I was born as a woman. I use *watashi* in formal conversations or in speeches, I use *uchi* with friends of my generation and in informal conversations" (Female, 21)

"I use *watashi* outside, but at home I use my first name" (Female, 20)

"I use *watashi* basically because it is not embarrassing, and I can use it in any situation with any person without causing uneasiness. I use *ware* and *wai* among my friends. I use them because I want to imitate a Youtuber that I like [who use both *ware* and *wai*]" (Female, 19)

"I have always been using my first name, however I started to use *uchi* with my friends. I use *jibun* in formal situations, when I don't really know the other person and with people older than me. In addition to that, I use *jibun* when I talk about myself and my past." (Female, 19)

"I use *ore* in conversations with friends or family, I use *boku* when I talk with superiors" (Male, 18)

"I use *ore* in private situations, I use *jibun* when talking with superiors" (Male, 18)

Many of the respondents change the first-person pronoun depending on the level of formality. For example, *ore* is regarded as informal and *boku* and *jibun* as formal by two 18 years old males. However, there were some differences in the perception of the level of formality of *uchi*: a 21-year-old female considered it "childish", so that she felt the need to switch to *atashi* growing up. Another 21 year-old-female regards *uchi* as informal ("I use *uchi* with friends of my generation and in informal conversations") and a 20 year-old-female uses *uchi* in formal situations instead. Some respondents also admit changing the first-person pronoun depending on the image they want to give of themselves. Ann example of that is provided by a 19-year-old female who says that she uses *wai* and *ware* with friends but uses *watashi* with other people not to create embarrassment. Probably, she just wants to appear as an ordinary girl in front of other people. Another element that emerge from one answer is that also the conversation's topic is important. In fact, a 19-year-old female states she uses *jibun* when talking about herself or her past.

Half of the respondents said that they have changed the first-person pronoun in their life. For example, a 20-year-old female who currently uses *atashi*, wrote that she used *uchi* in middle school because all of her friends used *uchi*. The usage of the first name as the first-person pronouns is regarded as infantile by most of the respondents. In fact, a 24-year-old female answered that she used her first name in the past, but when she became a university student, she started to feel ashamed and started to use *atashi* instead. A 27 year-old-male reported a similar process: he switched *boku* to *ore* when he reached middle school because he felt like *ore* seemed more mature. A 19-year-old female who uses *jibun* and *uchi* says that in the past she was using her first name. The reason for using *jibun* and *uchi* is because *watashi* or *atashi* are too feminine for her. Another 28-year-old female respondent wrote that she used *uchi* when she was a child because of her dialect (and now uses *watashi*). From these answers it is clear that age can play an important role in choosing the first personal pronoun. Growing up, kids start to feel embarrassed of using first-person pronouns regarded as "childish" and want to give a more "grown-up" impression of themselves to the world. In younger kids, it also plays a role which pronoun is used by their peers. For example, the 20-year-old female mentioned above, said that in middle school she was using *uchi* because all of her friends were using it.

5.1.4 Summary and conclusion

Japanese grammar books (Hasegawa 2015, Iwasaki 2013 among others) indicate only three factors that influence the choice of the first-person pronoun: biological sex, level of formality and

age. These factors were considered important also by the respondents of the questionnaire. 56.8% of the respondents indicated age, 54.5% indicated biological sex and 27.3% indicated level of formality. However, the results of my questionnaire show that there are more than three factors that play a role in choosing the first-person pronoun: the relationship with the interlocutor (84.1%), occupation (25%), dialect (11.4%), and sexual orientation (2.3%). Considering the answers to the question 6 ("Why did you choose this/these person-pronoun/s?"), it emerged that also peer pressure, the topic of conversation and how the speaker want to appear can affect the choice of the first-person pronoun. The choice and usage of the first-person pronoun appears as changeable and negotiable depending on the context of conversation. Most of the respondents switched between two, three or even four pronouns depending on many factors. Moreover, some respondents stated to use first-person pronouns that the Japanese grammar books do not include, such as *uchi*, *jibun*, *ware* and *washi*.

5.2 Survey on chiebukuro (Yahoo Japan)

The second part of my research is a survey that I conducted in *chiebukuro*, a forum in the online platform in Yahoo Japan. The reason I choose this method was because it was difficult for me to find or meet people in gender and sexual minorities and ask questions face to face. The goal of this online survey was to research how individuals with non-normative gender and sexual identities use first-person pronouns. The people with non-normative gender and sexual identities subject to my research are mostly gay (homosexual males), lesbian (homosexual females), transgender MtF (individuals born with a male anatomy who feel or want to transition to female), transgender FtM (individuals born with a female anatomy who feel or want to transition to male), *Xjendā* (individuals who identified as both women and men or as neither of them). The survey focused on understanding which first-person pronouns the respondents use in different environments, such as in school or work, family and with close friends. Previous studies regarding Japanese language and gender considered biological sex, gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation as the most important factors in choosing the first-person pronoun. After analyzing the answers of my questionnaire as well as previous studies, I assumed that there is a fifth category: masculinity and femininity. How people perceive themselves in terms of masculinity and femininity seems to be an important factor in the choice of the first-person pronoun. Therefore, I tried to understand whether the respondent feels masculine or feminine regardless of their gender identity. In other words, even though a female person feels as a woman, she can feel feminine or masculine, neither of them or a combination of them. Thus, I assume the perception of oneself as more masculine or as more feminine is critical in the choice of the first-person pronoun. Below you can find the questions of the survey.

Question 1	Which first-person pronoun do you use when talking at work or school? Why?
Question 2	Which first-person pronoun do you use when talking with your family? Why?
Question 3	Which first-person pronoun do you use when talking with your close friends? Why?
Question 4	Even though if you are a woman/men/neither of them/both of them, do you feel feminine or masculine? (Examples of answers: "I feel very/little masculine/feminine, neither feminine nor masculine or both feminine and masculine").
Question 5	Does your feeling masculine or feminine impact the choice of the first-person pronoun?
Question 6	Do you have other comments?

In my research I was particularly interested in understanding the prospective of *Xjendā,* FtM and MtF individuals in the usage of Japanese first-person pronouns since no previous research includes them.

5.2.1 *X-jendā*

Five respondents said that they identify as both women and men (*Xjendā*). Four of them of them had a female sex assigned at birth. N1 indicated to feeling slightly more masculine than feminine and to use both *watashi* and *ore* in school and with friends, *ore* with family and *watashi* during presentations in school. N1 reported to use *boku* when talking with intimate friends. N2 reported to use *watashi* in school and with family and to be willing to use *boku* but to not doing it out of fear of being discriminated. N2 said that if N2 had close friends who knew N2 were *Xjendā,* N2 would have used *boku* with them. N2 reported not to feel more masculine or more feminine depending on the moment.

N1 and N2 did not state a specific reason why they want to use *boku*, but we can assume that *boku* actually represent their inner masculine feelings.

N3 has a more complicated relationship in the usage of the first-person pronouns. N3 reported to identify as *Xjendā* and to feel somewhere between masculine and feminine and at times more feminine or masculine. N3 indicated to try to avoid using *watashi* and *boku*, because when using *watashi* N3 would exclude their masculine part and when using *boku* N3 would exclude their feminine side. This respondent expressed the frustration in the choice of the first-person pronouns because of the lack of gendered-neutral first-person pronouns. N3 reported to use the gender-neutral *jibun* when talking with close friends and the normative pronoun such as *watashi* that matches the biological sex in school and with family due to the social norms. The last respondent (N4) from this minority group gave a very interesting insight. N4 wrote that when feeling more masculine, N4 uses *boku* (僕) in *kanji* in writing and ボク in *katakana* (ボク) when feeling less masculine. In short, as N4 feels masculine N4 used the first-person masculine pronoun *boku.*

Three other respondents said that they are *Xjendā* as they do not identify as neither men nor women. They were all born with female anatomy. N5 reported to use *watashi* normally since N5 looks like a woman and therefore *watashi* is the socially accepted first-person pronoun. N5 uses *jibun* with friends who know that N5 are agender (neither masculine nor feminine) or online because the gender-neutral *jibun* matches with N5's personality. N6 reported to use *watashi* at school and work and the first name with family. N6 uses *watashi* because since N6 has a female body *watashi* fits with the respondent's appearance. N7 uses three different pronouns with family and close friends: *watashi*, *jibun* and *uchi*. N7 wrote to use because they match with N7's personality. The reason for using *watashi* is because it can be used both by males and females. The reason for using *jibun* is because it is a gender-neutral pronoun. N7 did not provide any reason for using *uchi*. This respondent wrote to feel sometimes masculine, sometimes feminine and other times a combination of both. This respondent claims that the feeling of being masculine or feminine does not have an actual impact on the choice of first-person pronouns because what matters the most is social norms. In fact, N7 said that even though ideally when N7 feels masculine the right pronoun to use would be *ore*, N7 try to mostly use *watashi* instead in order not to give a bad impression to the interlocutors.

The *X-jendā* respondents of my survey reported to have different experiences in the choice of the first-person pronouns. All of them experienced fear of discrimination, therefore they use different strategies in order to navigate between their inner feeling of masculinity and femininity and the social expectations. Almost all of the respondents reported to use *watashi* because of social norms. Three of them also said to use *jibun* since it is gender neutral. Masculinity and femininity seem to play an important role in the choice of the first-person pronoun. For example, N7 reported to have the desire to use ore when N7 feels more masculine. However, they do not feel free to express their masculinity and femininity due to society's expectations.

5.2.2. Transgender FtM and MtF

Five respondents in the online survey said that they are transgender FtM, which is the definition for people who were born with female anatomy but they identify as men. The first one said that his most used pronoun is *jibun* because since he was born as a female he is reluctant to use male pronouns. He mostly avoids using male pronouns like *ore* or *boku* although he wants to use them because he is still perceived as a woman from the outside world. Also the second respondent uses the gender neutral *jibun* with the outside world because he did not come out as trans, therefore he is still perceived as a woman. He uses *ore* with people who know he is FtM. Both the third and the fourth

respondents use *jibun* with people that knows they are FtM, *watashi* with the outside world and their own names with family. The third one wrote that although his gender identity is male, he feels sometimes masculine, sometimes feminine and other times in between. That is why he uses the gender-neutral *jibun*. The fourth one reported to feel masculine, but he did not give an explanation on why he uses *jibun*. The fifth one uses *jibun* as the first-person pronoun ordinarily and *ore* with very close friends. Except for the third respondent, all the others would like to use masculine pronouns such as *boku* or *ore*, but they do not do that in public in order to conform to the social norms.

Two transgender women (MtF) participated in my online survey. The first respondent wrote that she always uses *watashi*. She said that she feels more feminine than masculine but claims that does not have an influence on her first-person pronoun choice. She wrote that even tough in Japanese language there are masculine pronouns such as *boku* and *ore*, everyone over 25 years old should naturally switch to *watashi* because it is more appropriate. For her it is not the feeling of femininity or masculinity, but the age plays a role. The second respondent is a middle school student. She says that uses *boku* at schools because she is still perceived as a "boy" from her appearance and no one knows she is trans. According to her, masculinity and femininity plays an important role in the choice of the first-person pronoun. In fact, she chooses to use *boku* as a compromise in school because she perceives it as androgynous and less masculine than *ore*.

5.2.3 Homosexuals

The last groups of respondents in my online survey identified as homosexuals. From the answers of the research, the most important factors seem to be the fifth category of masculinity and femininity in addition to social expectations attached to the first-person pronouns. Six homosexual women answered to my research and five of them simply used *watashi*, since it is considered a female pronoun and they perceive themselves as women. Three of them said that they perceive themselves as feminine: the first respondent said she uses *watashi*, the second one said that she uses *watashi* and their own name with family and the third one uses *watashi*, *uchi* and her first name. These three use a feminine first-person pronoun *watashi* because they are women and feel feminine. One of the respondents said that she is in the middle between masculinity and femininity and she uses *uchi* and *watashi*.

Two of them said that they perceived themselves as masculine. One of them said that uses *watashi* and *jibun* at school. She uses *washi* (masculine) and *ware* (gender-neutral) with family and *jibun* or her first name with close friends. The reason for using *washi* and *ware* is that she does not want to use *watashi* which is too feminine for her, but she thinks it is not appropriate to use the gender

neutral *jibun* with her family. When she talks with herself alone, she uses *boku*. The second one uses *jibun* in school/work and her own first name with family. She says that she feels uncomfortable using *watashi*. These two masculine women choose a gender neutral *jibun*, but in public they seem to choose to conform to the social norms and avoid using *ore* or *boku*.

Among the four homosexual men, two of them said they feel masculine. The first one of them uses *watashi* in formal business environment and *ore* when he is among colleagues. He also uses *ore* with family because he has always used it since he was a child. The second one uses *watakushi* or *jibun* in polite conversations with women and *watakushi* or ore in polite conversations with men. He occasionally uses *ore* also with women if they have a very close relationship. He uses many first-person pronouns with family: *ore*, *jibun*, *onīchan* (big brother) with his small sister and brother and *ojisan* (uncle) with his nephews and nieces. The other two homosexual male respondents said that they both identify in the middle between masculinity and femininity. The first on of them uses *watashi* with friends and *boku* with teachers. He said he uses *boku* with teachers because he does not want them to think he might be gay since he is scared to be discriminated against if they find out. He actually wants to use *watashi*, but he is scared that people would discover that he is gay. He fears that because normally a feminine man is considered as gay by the society. Therefore, he avoids using first-person pronouns as much as possible. He also wrote that he cannot use his first name because it is not a common expression for boys to use as a first-person pronoun.

In short, the sexual orientation does not play a role in the choice of first-person pronouns, but rather the feeling of masculinity and femininity determines the choice. However, in reality the social norms and stereotypes attached to the first-person pronouns might influence their actual choices.

5.2.4 Summary and conclusion

The second part of my research consisted in an online survey was conducted in *chiebukuro*, a forum in the online platform in Yahoo Japan. I decided to do this survey online because I wanted to analyze the usage of first-person pronouns in non-normative gender and sexuality groups but turned out to be difficult for me to do that in person when I was in Japan. Previous studies considered biological sex, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation as important factors in minority groups. From my online survey results it seem that the perception as masculine, feminine both of them or neither of them plays a role to some extent in the first-person pronoun choice. From my survey, sexual orientation itself does not seem to be important in the first-pronoun choice. Moreover, biological sex and gender identity do not always influence the choice of the first-person pronoun, but where on the spectrum from masculinity to femininity the respondents does sometimes.

However, social norms and expectations more often than not force them to choose normative first-person pronouns. What matters the most is always not how one feels, but how he/she will be perceived by the society. In fact, most of the transgender respondent avoids using their preferred pronouns in order to meet society's expectations.

5.3 Summary

The results of my questionnaire conducted at Waseda University challenges normative explanations provided by Japanese grammar books (Hasegawa 2015, Iwasaki 2013 among others) which indicate only three factors that influence the choice of the first-person pronoun: biological sex, level of formality and age. In fact, also the relationship with the interlocutor, occupation, dialect, peer pressure, the topic of conversation and how the speaker want to appear can affect the choice of the first-person pronoun. Moreover, the respondents indicated to use first-person pronouns such as *uchi*, *jibun*, *ware* and *washi*, which are not included in the list of first-person pronouns by Japanese grammar books.

The results of the online survey showed that even though gender identity and biological sex are important factors, one's feeling of being masculine, feminine both of them or neither of them seems to play a role in the first-person pronoun choice. However, since most of the respondents in minority groups try avoiding to use their preferred pronoun in fear of being stigmatized in the society, normative norms and stereotypes attached to first-person pronouns have also a central role in the respondents' choice process and actual use.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated the usage of first-person pronouns in Japanese language. The main goals were to discuss the definition and history of Japanese first-person pronouns (Chapter 2), the factors that play a role in the choice of the first-person pronouns for Japanese speakers (Chapter 3) and the choice process and usage of first-person pronouns in non-normative gender and sexuality groups (Chapter 4).

The main findings of this thesis can be summarized as follows.

In Chapter 2 it was discussed that even though some linguistics (Lyon 1977, Kuroda 1967, Wetzel 1994, Martin 1975, among others) claimed that Japanese language does not have personal pronouns mainly because of different formal features between Indo-European languages and Japanese language, I concluded that Japanese language appears to have personal pronouns for mainly two reasons. Firstly, Japanese language requires a clear difference between the speaker and the addresser. Secondly, self-referring terms in Japanese language can only refer to the speaker. Moreover, I introduced how Hasegawa and Hirose (2005) bring evidential to prove that Japanese language has not only a relational self, but also an absolute self which is clear and fixed.

As for the history of first-person pronouns, this study investigated w*atakushi, watashi, atashi, atai, washi, jibun, ore, boku,* and *uchi.*
Watakushi is the formal version of *watashi. Watashi* is used by females both in formal and informal contexts and by males in formal contexts only. *Watashi* originally included the notion of individual or self, as opposed to the general public. Therefore, it started to indicate the first person (Ishiyama 2019). *Atashi* is traditionally feminine and casual (Abe 2010). According to the *Gogen yurai jisho* (Etimological Dictonary)[14], *atashi* and *atai* started to get popular from the Meiji Period (1868-1912). *Atai* was used mainly by kids and women from the pleasure quarters in Tokyo. *Atai* is considered an informal feminine pronoun (Yamaguchi 2007). *Washi* is considered to be a pronoun for old men (Miyazaki, 2004).
Jibun is considered as masculine form and a reflexive pronoun (Kanemaru, 1997). It is often associated with men in sports or in militaristic groups such as *Jieitai* (Self-Defense Army) or the

[14] http://gogen-allguide.com/

police force. According to Nakamura, (2014:48-49) in recent years *jibun* started to have the same position as *boku* in the Tokyo area.

Boku and *ore* are both considered masculine and informal. They differ in terms of masculinity, strength and power. *Ore* is regarded as more masculine and aggressive, whereas *boku* is considered milder, like a pronoun for young and good boys. The first-person pronoun *boku* was directly derived from the so-called "school boy speech". After its spread, *ore* started to be considered as the personal pronoun for the illiterate class. Later on, it started to be used positively to express strong masculinity. In recent years, *boku* began to be considered as infantile and weak.

Uchi is regarded as less feminine and formal than *atashi* (Yamaguchi, 2007). It originally meant "inside" or "home" and it considered as a non-standard first-person pronoun. According to Miyazaki (2004) *uchi* seems to be a newly created first-person pronoun in the Tokyo area.

Normative explanations claim that first-person pronouns are chosen depending on sex, level of formality and sometimes age. The first-person pronouns were thus divided according to a binary and fixed scheme. Later studies on first-person pronouns this essentialist view from the 70s and 80s, which were based on the sexes' dichotomy. In these new studies (Miyazaki 2004, Abe 2004, Abe 2010, Marie 2008, Okamoto and Shibamoto-Smith 2016, among others), level of formality, biological sex and age were no longer considered the only criteria behind the choice of first personal pronouns. In addition to biological sex, gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation were introduced as other factors in the choice of first-person pronoun. Treating both gender and the language as performative and changeable, the new studies problematize pre-given and fixed concepts of "Japanese women/men" or "Japanese female/male speech". That enables them to include in the research speakers that fall outside the "normative" patterns, including a much wider group of Japanese speakers, for example gender and sexual minorities.

The results of my questionnaire conducted at Waseda University challenges normative explanations provided by Japanese grammar books (Hasegawa 2015, Iwasaki 2013 among others) which indicate only three factors that influence the choice of the first-person pronoun: biological sex, level of formality and age. The other factors important for the choice of first-person pronouns found in my research were: the relationship with the interlocutor, occupation, dialect, peer pressure, the topic of conversation and how the speaker want to appear. My findings indicate also that Japanese speakers uses first-person pronouns which are not included in the list of first-person pronouns by Japanese grammar books (Hasegawa 2015, Iwasaki 2013 among others), such as *uchi*, *jibun*, *ware* and *washi*.

Later studies in Japanese language and gender (Miyazaki 2004, Abe 2004, Abe 2010, Marie 2008, Okamoto and Shibamoto-Smith 2016, among others) stressed the importance of gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation in the choice of the first-person pronouns in sexual and gender minority groups. The results of my online survey indicated that there is a fifth category which is crucial to the choice of the personal pronouns, which is masculinity and femininity. Masculinity and femininity are understood as fluid categories that are on a spectrum. One's feeling of being masculine, feminine both of them or neither of them seems to play a role in the first-person pronoun choice. However, my research proves that normative norms and stereotypes attached to first-person pronouns have also a central role in the respondents' choice process and actual use. In fact, most of the respondents in minority groups try to avoid using their preferred pronoun in public in order to conform to society's expectations.

6.1 Concluding remarks

In this thesis I have shown the gap between normative explanation and the actual diversity of the first-person pronouns used by Japanese speakers. I have also examined the factors that can play a role in the choice of first-person pronouns to give new insight in this field.

The studies that I presented previously (Chapter 4) did not investigate how genderqueer and transsexual groups negotiate the normative language speech through linguistic features such as first-person pronouns. I hope that my study proved the necessity to include these minority groups in further researchers in the field, in order to acquire a deeper and comprehensive understanding of Japanese language development.

Dictionaries

Gogen yurai jisho (Etimological Dictonary) http://gogen-allguide.com/

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