Reappraisal of the L2 Experiences After Return to Japan

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With a focus on two return migrants, I explore how they perceived their second language (L2) experiences in New Zealand and navigated their L2 user identities after resettlement in Japan, drawing on the theoretical construct of investment. Narrative inquiry is employed as the means of collecting and analysing the data. The themes identified from the interviews were synthesised into story form, and it was further investigated in relation to dimensions of social activity from the perspective of multiscalar analysis. The findings revealed that, although it was a site of struggle to negotiate their identities in New Zealand, the linguistic capital that they gained there became valued as symbolic capital in Japan that benefits others. This prompted them to learn again, despite having previously divested from English. They reappraised their L2 experiences across time and space, which enabled them to make positive attributions about their associated gains.

本研究では、帰国移民2名を対象とし、両者が、ニュージーランドでのL2経験をどのように認識し、そして日本再定住後にL2使用者としてのアイデンティティをどのようにナビゲートしているのかを、「投資」という理論構成を用い探求した。データの収集と分析の手段には、ナラティブ・インクワイアリーを使用した。インタビューから特定されたテーマを基に作成された「ストーリー」は、マルチスケーラー分析の観点から、社会的活動の次元との関連で精査された。その結果、帰国移民にとってニュージーランドはアイデンティティ交渉の葛藤の場でしかなかったが、そこで得た言語資本は、帰国後、他者に貢献できる象徴資本として評価されるものであったことが明らかになった。それは、一旦離脱した英語学習を再開させる契機ともなり、つまり、時間と空間を隔てた上で、L2経験は肯定的に解釈・再評価され得ることを意味している。

In this article, I report on a study that investigated how two adult return migrants who resettled in Japan perceived their L2 experiences, along with their decision to leave New Zealand. Immigrating to New Zealand was a significant undertaking for them, as they had to leave behind everything they had built up in Japan, including social status, and commit to rebuilding their lives in a country with language and cultural barriers. Overseas emigration is a life transition that has a high potential of disrupting one's sense of self, as much of what they are familiar with becomes unsettled (Block, 2014). In my larger research project involving eight Japanese adult immigrants in New Zealand, I found that despite such determined migration, there were instances where families returned to Japan after several years. The focus here is on returnees' L2 experiences, particularly how their investment in English and identity negotiation in the New Zealand community influenced their return to Japan, as well as how they navigated their L2 user identities upon resettlement.

To explore the return migrants' L2 experiences, this study draws attention to the social aspects of language learning. L2 proficiency heavily influences cross-cultural adaptation (Masgoret & Ward, 2006) and enhances social inclusion outcomes in mainstream society (Piller & Takahashi, 2011; Yates, 2011). Importantly, L2 learning is viewed as a socially-situated activity that occurs through interaction (Douglas Fir Group, 2016), which is regarded as the process by which learners construct common understanding and relationships with others (Firth & Wagner, 2007). Thus, L2 learning is an inextricable aspect of social practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Accordingly, having access to and participating in a target language community is therefore encouraged, and is considered the key element for settlement success, despite limited initial language proficiency. However, the opportunities to make the necessary social connections for L2 practices involve potential challenges for immigrants. In some cases, the obstacle is not L2 learners' individual features or attitudes towards learning, but the target language community's reluctance to welcome their access and participation (Norton, 2013). Native speakers often avoid interaction with non-native speakers, rather than help them to negotiate meaning (Yates, 2011). When opportunities to interact are constrained and opportunities to practise English are limited, many L2 immigrants struggle to integrate and consequently become marginalised (Dörnyei, 1990, 2005). Therefore,

new immigrants with insufficient English tend to be among the most powerless in the community.

Associated with issues of power negotiations in language learning and use is Norton's (2013) construct of investment. It provides a theoretical lens for this study for understanding how and why the participants engaged in or withdrew from specific contexts, for example, from New Zealand society in the present study. Drawing on the construct of investment, I examined whether the consequences of participants' move and experiences in New Zealand resulted in any decisions to resist the use and learning of English by divesting from the language, including abandoning life in New Zealand and returning to Japan.

I investigated the participants' subjective reality through narrative inquiry, giving them agentive voices. At the same time, because the individuals are situated in larger social structures that inevitably influence their actions, my research also revealed how historical, cultural, and discursive circumstances have shaped the narratives of the participants.

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

The present study adopted broadly poststructuralist and sociocultural approaches, which view language learning as a socially constructed practice. In particular, the theoretical frameworks I used are Norton's (2013) conceptualisations of identity and investment and Darvin and Norton's (2015) expanded model of investment.

Investment is a complement to the psychological construct of motivation (Clément & Norton, 2021). Whereas motivation is often conceptualised as a single, coherent characteristic of an individual, investment is seen as a complex, sociological construct where individuals are viewed as social beings whose identities evolve over time and through social interactions (Darvin & Norton, 2021).

Norton (2013) argued that learners invest in a language because they expect to acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital and social power. However, whether learners are able to invest in a target language depends on how power is negotiated in different fields. Learners could be highly motivated to learn a language, but might not necessarily be invested in the language practices of a given community, particularly if these practices are socially discriminatory. Learners exercise their agency to invest in a particular practice. Therefore, investment in learning involves not only affirming the existing identities of learners and empowering them to claim the right to speak, but it also enables them to imagine new identities and affiliations.

Darvin and Norton (2015) further developed the construct of investment by presenting an expanded model in response to evolving theories that reshape language ideologies, linguistic capital, and interactions within the changing communicative landscape (see Blommaert, 2013; Bourdieu, 1986; Kramsch, 2006). Affirmation of identity plays an important role in language investment, but the extent to which a learner's identity can be approved is determined by ideology, "the dominant idea that organises and stabilises society, as well as determining modes of inclusion and exclusion" (Darvin & Norton. 2015, p. 8). These ideologies, usually underpinned by sociocultural norms and institutional power, also influence learners' identities by shaping the value of the various forms of capital they possess (Darvin and Norton, 2015).

The expanded model of investment has been adopted in diverse research contexts in recent years, such as with language learners (Gearing & Roger, 2018; Nasrollahi Shahri, 2018; Sung, 2020), language teachers (Barkhuizen, 2016; Lawrence & Nagashima, 2019), digital media (Jiang et al., 2020; Lai et al., 2020; Stranger-Johannessen, 2017), and among LGBTQ communities (Schreuder, 2019). In these studies, researchers demonstrated how investment is intertwined with broad social forces, where circulating power constructs "modes of inclusion and exclusion through and beyond language" (De Costa & Norton, 2016, p. 588). Applying this model to my study made it possible to examine which ideological structures shaped the way the participants' capital was valued or devalued and how they were positioned or how they positioned themselves. This enabled a deeper understanding of their investment in L2 learning at the intersection of identity, capital, and ideology.

In addition, it was necessary to explore the individuals' reintegration process from the perspective of meaning making, as their narratives did not end when the participants arrived back in Japan. There has been limited research focusing on adult returnees' identity construction in the society of origin. Little is known about how they change in terms of their practices, feelings, values and subjectivities after they return home (Guo & Miao, 2021). To summarise, my research questions in this study were as follows:

RQ1 How did the return migrants' investment in English and their identities within the New Zealand communities impact their decision to return to Japan?

RQ2 How have they since come to terms with their L2 experiences and imagined futures?

Methodology

In order to make sense of the participants' subjective experiences and grasp the context holistically, I employed a *biographical case study* (Barkhuizen et al., 2014) as one type of narrative inquiry methodology. The biological case study focused on individuals, drawing data from the participant and writing them up as narratives, possibly leading to further analysis. Chase (2003) emphasised that "if we take seriously the idea that people make sense of experience and communicate meaning through narration, then in-depth interviews should become occasions in which we ask for life stories" (p. 274). For this study, I elicited first-hand accounts of the experiences of the two return migrants through their narratives, the meaning making process of human experience, which connects their past and present, and assists them to envision their future (Kramp, 2004). In other words, in the process of narrative construction, the participants' crucial experiences were analysed from their perspective to see how they are intertwined with their L2-related trajectories in New Zealand.

The participants were recruited through snowball sampling, which is "a method for sampling (or selecting) the cases in a network [that] begins with one or a few people or cases and spreads out on the basis on links to the initial cases" (Neuman, 2014, p. 275). They gave informed consent, and the project was cleared with the approval of the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee. Table 1 provides the participants' demographic details. Comparing the experiences of the two participants, Aiko and Saya (pseudonyms), in this article allowed me to pay due respect to the individual idiosyncrasies of their histories and changing identities, from past to present and future. At the same time, it also enabled relevant comparisons based on the similarities in the participants' conceptions and interpretations of their experiences, as well as the positions they found themselves in.

For both participants, three interviews were conducted, each lasting approximately two hours. The first two interviews were sequential, held within a few weeks of each other. The third interview was set to take place a few months later, where I focused on and explored prominent themes that had appeared in the previous two interviews. All interviews were transcribed verbatim by myself to ensure an accurate reflection of the participants' responses.

The analytical steps began with a thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008), and the themes identified were then synthesised into narrative configurations, which is referred to as narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995) or narrative writing (Benson, 2013, 2018), that addressed my research topic in a coherent story form. The stories of the participants

Table 1
Participants' Demographic Details

	Aiko	Saya
Age	53	44
Past residence	Kanagawa Prefecture	Chiba Prefecture
Arrival in New Zealand	March 2013	January 2012
Reasons for leaving Japan	To protect their children from the harmful effects of radioactive substances due to the Fukushima nuclear disaster	To escape from the nuclear radiation caused by the Fukushima nuclear disaster.
Family members	Two daughters, 14 and 17 years old, moved to New Zealand with Aiko. Husband, who works as a lawyer, stayed in Japan, and provided financial support.	9-year-old daughter and 13-year-old son who moved from and returned to Japan with Saya. Husband, an IT engineer, remained alone in Chiba, Japan.
Stay in New Zealand	4.5 years	6 years
Return to Japan	August 2017	March 2018
Current residence	Aichi Prefecture	Fukuoka Prefecture
Status	Part-time itinerant English teacher	Sews part-time, works from home
Index of English proficiency	IELTS Academic Training Test 6.0 (gained in July 2014)	None

were interpreted and discussed to gain an in-depth understanding of the meaning making of their lived experiences across time and space. The stories were investigated in relation to the dimensions of social activity represented by micro, meso, and macro levels, with respect to the multi-layered framework developed by the Douglas Fir Group (2016) and Barkhuizen (2016). This was done to comprehend the language practices and identity construction taking place in these varying and interrelated scales of context. Examining the details from a wider contextual and intersectional perspective informed the interpretation of the narratives of each participant.

Findings

The findings section centres around each participant's stories as a result of my "writing as analysis" of the data (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Benson, 2013, 2018; Polkinghorne, 1995). The stories constructed are a research text in which "research findings are there to be found" (Benson 2013, p. 258). Therefore, they are comprehensive and entail close examination of data from the participants.

Aiko's Story:
"I knew full well that I was taking on more than I could handle".

Living overseas in New Zealand with her two children, there was a crucial need for Aiko to use English to survive. She pestered English speakers to repeat themselves over and over again "as if I was a little kid", feeling miserable and on the verge of tears: "But in order to look after and protect my daughters I just had to be able to get a message across". Unlike many Japanese who have a fear of committing mistakes while speaking English, she could "live with the embarrassment of my broken English". As the sole caregiver to her children, she could not succumb to hesitation due to the nervousness or anxiety that she felt with native speakers. She refused to be silenced (Norton, 2013)—her identity as a mother was more important than her identity as an inferior L2 speaker.

Aiko's identity as a mother engendered a strong sense of responsibility to provide a better life for her children, and this propelled her to enter university. The final goal was gaining legitimate membership in New Zealand evidenced as permanent residency status. She attended English language schools and gained an IELTS score of 6.0. With that achievement, Aiko envisioned a future in which she became a lawyer in New Zealand making use of her cultural capital as a law graduate in Japan. She was accepted into an undergraduate law programme in which only one out of fifty students could pass through the admission, the reason being that "if you were an international student, you were automatically welcomed in". The admission loophole adversely made her student life miserable. She could not keep up with the classes, and the lecturers seemed aloof and only pointed out flaws in her English, despite her meeting the university's English proficiency requirement. To her, it seemed unreasonable that the university's stated target of concern was Maori and Pasifika students and that there was no support for international students whose tuition fees were set five times as much as that of domestic students. Linguistically and culturally, she felt peripheral and invisible. After one and a half years, she was dismissed from the university after failing two-thirds of the courses, even though she had tried to negotiate a way to remain in the programme. This made her acutely conscious of her ascribed and exploited identity (Chowdhury & Le Ha, 2014) as an L2 international student, and of the hegemonic relations between international students and the institutional ideology of the university (Shore, 2010). Drawing on the insights of Darvin and Norton (2015), it is clear that the prevailing ideology impacted her identity by determining the value of the capital she possessed or wished to acquire. As a result, Aiko, exhausted by having invested so much time and money in her imagined future, relinquished her dream of permanent residency.

Around that time, 4 years after moving to New Zealand, her eldest daughter said that she wanted to try out high school in Japan. Aiko agreed to return to Japan.

> I thought being educated in Japan was important for my daughters, but honestly, I was so worn out from living this life in New Zealand. The application for permanent residency had an age limit of 55, and I was losing confidence that we could succeed by then.

Reflecting upon Aiko's own life in New Zealand, she was not sure if it was meaningful. She was not even sure if her English improved as she felt it should have. To her surprise, however, after settling back in Japan, Aiko found a part-time job as an itinerant primary-school English teacher. She is glad that her experiences in New Zealand have become useful to other Japanese people. The outcomes in her life after returning home began to imbue her own previous trajectory with significance.

Saya's Story:
"This would never happen in Japan. I just had to grin and bear it".

Initially, Saya too, had a plan to get a job and become a permanent resident. She knew that her experience had little social value in New Zealand and that a high level of English proficiency would be necessary. She decided to abandon the plan at an early stage, considering the long road ahead if she started learning English from such a basic

level. Therefore, until the end, the L2 community in New Zealand remained an imagined community that was not immediately tangible and accessible for her, a community in which English was the most important means of gaining this future affiliation (Kanno & Norton, 2003). Saya never tried to negotiate her identity within the L2 community; hence she received little access to the material resources that immigrants usually seek (Gearing & Roger, 2018; Yates, 2011). Instead, she learnt to exercise restraint and tolerate situations that "would never happen" in Japan. For example, having to deal with real estate agents was one experience that left her feeling bitter.

> The agent I encountered was quite rude. I asked him to take his shoes off when he came to our house to do an inspection, but he barged right in without taking them off. He yelled "dirty!" when he yanked open the oven doors without even asking me first. But my lack of English silenced me, even though I wanted to tell him off. All I could do was watch him do all that.

Another example is that the downstairs neighbour tormented her by always complaining whenever Saya's family were making any noise, so Saya and her children had very brief showers just twice a week. In a sense, this is an identity underpinned by being patient that she constructed as an L2 user in New Zealand. The reason she avoided interacting with English speakers was due to her fear of making mistakes or saying something that sounded strange or awkward. The fact that she was less uncomfortable making conversation with those who spoke English as their L2 is understandable, given the inequitable social structure of her relationships with native speakers as documented by Canagarajah (2005).

Time passed, and after 6 years of living in New Zealand, she applied for her son's annual visa extension as usual through an immigration agency. This time, though, the agency made a crucial error by forgetting to submit her son's X-ray test results. This mistake meant his visa had expired. When she realised they were overstaying, "I was on the verge of collapsing mentally, thinking we could be deported any minute for being illegal residents in the country". The stress of this experience gave Saya a big shock. It clearly brought home to her the sense of powerlessness that she felt when she could not take care of the family's vital matters by herself, due to her lack of English. She was shaken by the precarious situation they had been in, commenting "I always was vaguely aware that we had to head back home to Japan someday, but this really made me think we were better off in Japan".

In terms of her English proficiency, Saya did not notice much improvement while living in New Zealand. However, she became aware for the first time after coming back to Japan that she had indeed improved: "I helped a foreigner who asked me the way in simple English, which I couldn't do 6 years ago". Finding out that her English could be appreciated in Japan, where the majority do not speak English, she was pleased that she could make some use of it and help people. She is now able to think positively about English, inspiring her to study English once more in Japan.

Discussion

Prompted by her elder daughter's wish to attend a Japanese high school, Aiko's family ended their four and a half years in New Zealand. Saya was shaken by her experience of almost being an illegal immigrant and became aware of the precariousness of their residency status, which triggered her decision to return home after 6 years. By then, both women were "worn out" from their "strenuous life". With that decision, Aiko was released from a life in which she "was taking on more than I could handle", and Saya from a life that she had to "grin and bear it". The common feature shared by the participants was that they had become *exhausted migrants* (Castelli, 2018). This is a phenomenon brought about by the psychological, social, economic, and political overt or covert marginalisation in the host country. For the participants, it was not as easy as they had imagined to negotiate their identities and to secure a place for themselves in New Zealand, either by leveraging their capital or by acquiring English proficiency. For the exhausted migrants, leaving New Zealand ultimately meant no further continued investment; instead, it meant divestment from the English language and literacy practices of New Zealand and their L2 user identities, with which they had hoped to access their once-imagined future (Darvin & Norton, 2017).

After coming back home, however, a beneficial *turning-point effect* that involved "a discontinuity with the past that removed disadvantageous past options and provided new options for constructive change" (Rutter, 2013, p. 479) was seen. Aiko was able to obtain a job teaching English in a primary school, which gave her the opportunity to put her New Zealand experience to good use. Saya was able to give a foreigner directions and realised that she had in fact acquired some English, which stimulated her to study English once more. It was only in their lives after returning to Japan that the trajectories they had been on were finally given meaning. The key here was self-efficacy, by which they were able to help others using English. Their sense of efficacy through social action facilitated personal resilience.

Aiko and Saya emphasised the pleasure of knowing that their experiences had been useful to others. This helped them to think positively about English and encouraged

them to learn again. The return on the investment here can be defined as *prosocial behaviour*, "voluntary behaviour intended to benefit another" (Eisenberg et al., 2007, p. 646). It is also a way in which they can distribute the power acquired through their linguistic capital. Having experienced marginalisation themselves, they seem to be empathetic to those who are disadvantaged in terms of linguistic accessibility. In this context, their new investment in English learning is not due to a desire to accumulate economic, social, or cultural capital—forms of capital that can be leveraged to challenge unequal power relations, particularly those concerning the native/non-native speaker dichotomy. Indeed, Aiko was already financially comfortable enough to live without working, and Saya's interest in studying English was reawakened by incidental interactions. The yield they expect is to acquire, I would argue, what Luthans et al. (2007) called psychological capital that is characterised by features of hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism. It was the feeling of being important to others that gave the participants the sense that they are valued in society, which they could not experience easily in New Zealand.

The participants' L2 experiences began to take on meaning as the participants successfully interacted with others in Japan. Meaning is made when people change the meaning of adverse events to being ultimately of value in promoting growth (Park & Blake, 2020). Their stories illustrate how, for the participants, the linguistic capital gained in New Zealand became symbolic capital in Japan. In reappraising their L2 experiences across time and space, they were able to derive positive attributions about the specific gains associated with these experiences (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006).

Conclusion

In this study, I explored how return migrants navigated their L2 user identities during their stay in New Zealand and upon their return to Japan, aiming to capture their subjective reality of lived experience. In an era of superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007), research needs to continue investigating the complexity of migration, with a particular emphasis on the fluidity and multiplicity of migrant identities, their linguistic practices, and the resources they appropriate. International migration is often viewed as a one-way movement, but the reverse trajectory should also be considered. Migration does not necessarily lead to permanent settlement. Further research should be carried out from a potentially longitudinal perspective on those returnees, focusing on their identity (re)construction and its implications for further language learning and language use. The implication of this study is to draw attention to a spatiotemporal perspective into the context of L2 learners' language learning and use, which could be applied to other

contexts such as classroom foreign language learning and study abroad, in order to understand learners' meaning making in their learning experiences. Although the scope of the study was intentionally focused on the participants' L2 experiences, investment in English, and the influence of these factors on their decision to return to Japan as well as their subsequent lives in Japan, a more comprehensive examination of other facets of the participants' lives in New Zealand, such as their interactions with L1 Japanese communities, may have provided a richer understanding of their experiences. As such, future research may benefit from a broader exploration of the returnees' lived experiences. This article has laid significant groundwork for these inquiries and represents a major step forward in understanding L2 immigrant identities.

Bio Data

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