

5-2018

Crafting Japanese-ness: An Ethnographic Study of Parents' Attitudes toward Language Maintenance in a Japanese Community in the United States

Lorvelis Amelia Madueño
University of New Orleans

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.uno.edu/honors_theses



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Madueño, Lorvelis Amelia, "Crafting Japanese-ness: An Ethnographic Study of Parents' Attitudes toward Language Maintenance in a Japanese Community in the United States" (2018). *Senior Honors Theses*. 111.
https://scholarworks.uno.edu/honors_theses/111

This Honors Thesis-Unrestricted is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate Showcase at ScholarWorks@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UNO. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uno.edu.

**Crafting Japanese-ness: An Ethnographic Study of Parents' Attitudes toward
Language Maintenance in a Japanese Community in the United States**

An Honors Thesis

Presented to

the Department of Anthropology
of the University of New Orleans

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of
Bachelor of Arts, with University High Honors
and Honors in Anthropology

by

Lorvelis Amelia Madueño

May 2018

Acknowledgements

I would like to gratefully thank everyone at the Japanese Weekend School of New Orleans for their support and collaboration throughout this thesis. I would also like to express my special gratitude and admiration toward the seven participants of this study for sharing their life stories with me. My deepest appreciation goes to every single parent and grandparent at this school, for all the effort they invest in their children and grandchildren's language education.

I would like to thank my adviser, Dr. Ryan Gray, for imparting his knowledge and sharing his expertise and guidance with me. Working with him was truly a pleasure. My thanks and appreciation also go to Rachel Breunlin, my second reader, for being a constant source of inspiration. Thank you both for helping me shape my skills as an anthropologist.

Lastly, I would like to dedicate this thesis to: My friends at GOEN Maracaibo, for encouraging me to pursue my dreams; David Carrillo, for always believing in me; Claudio Soto, for ten years of unconditional friendship; Maria and Ruth, for their endless support; my brother Loendry, for his love and guidance; and my sister Loraine, for showing me that there is no greater love than that of a mother.

*In loving memory of my father, Ramiro Madueño (1954-2006) and
my grandfather, Rodolfo Mosca (1952-2013)*

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Introduction.....	5
I. Japanese Immigrants in the United States.....	8
II. Japanese Language Education in the United States.....	12
III. The Japanese Community in New Orleans, Louisiana.....	14
IV. Research Context: The Japanese Weekend School of New Orleans.....	18
V. The Teachers/Parents.....	22
VI. Language/Culture Learning at the School.....	41
Conclusion.....	44
References.....	46

Abstract

This study documents the attitudes and perspectives toward Japanese language education of seven “newly-arrived” Japanese immigrants, jp. *Shin-issei*, who are raising bilingual or multilingual children in New Orleans, Louisiana. The participants of this study consisted of six mothers and one father who speak Japanese to their children at home and act as teachers of this language at the Japanese Weekend School of New Orleans, jp. *Nyū Orinzu Nihongo Hoshūkō*, a supplementary language school. Grounded in ethnographic fieldwork and interviews, this thesis has two interrelated objectives: One is to analyze parents’ attitudes toward Japanese language maintenance and show that although the home remains the crucial site for language education, the Japanese School of New Orleans represents a relevant site for the maintenance of the Japanese language and the indoctrination of Japanese cultural values. The second is to explore how these parents connect the process of teaching at and attending the school to a sentiment of diasporic nationalism. This study calls for a renewed ethnographic focus on often ignored—or known by few— immigrant communities in Louisiana by recognizing the presence of Japanese immigrants in this area, their constant efforts to maintain ties and connections to their home country, and their motivations to do so.

Keywords: Japanese language education, *shin-issei*, Japan, ethnography, diasporic nationalism.

Introduction

After a couple of months of trying to come up with a research project in which I could engage in both library research and fieldwork while working in a Japanese community, I decided it was time to ask someone for advice. I contacted Mike Turner, a friend of mine who happens to be the president of the Japan Society of New Orleans (JSNO), an organization that fosters friendly relationships between Japan and the United States. Upon explaining what I wanted to do, Mike recommended that I talk to Greg Tsukiyama, the Vice-President of the Japan Club of New Orleans (JCNO), a social and recreational club for Japanese citizens, Japanese-Americans, and their families. On a rainy February afternoon, I met Tsukiyama-san¹ in a coffee shop in Metairie, one of New Orleans' suburbs. After explaining what I wished to do, he said:

If you're interested in researching Japanese food chains in New Orleans, I can give you the contact information of all the Japanese people that own restaurants in the area. If you're interested in Japanese families going through immigration issues, I have a good friend that deals with that. There's also the Japanese language weekend school but that's complicated. (fieldnotes. 2017)

The moment he said, "language school," I knew our conversation was going to take an interesting turn. I started my Japanese language studies in my home country, Venezuela, two years before moving to New Orleans. I decided to learn Japanese because of my interest in Japanese popular culture. I continued those studies later at the University of New Orleans and during a summer abroad in Japan in 2016. As these thoughts converged in my mind, I asked Tsukiyama-san to tell me more about the weekend school. He crossed his arms and taking a deep

¹ Japanese honorific.

breath, he said:

I'm sure you've never heard about it, not a lot of people know it exists. They teach Japanese to Japanese and Japanese-American children. If you don't speak the language, it'll be difficult for you to get into the school. (fieldnotes. 2017)

After telling him that I was proficient in Japanese, he laughed and said: "Very well, you should contact Himura-sensei², he teaches at the school. He'll be able to tell you whether or not you can attend their classes." Subsequently, he handed me his business card with the teacher's contact information written in the back. I thanked Tsukiyama-san for his help and immediately sent an email to Himura-sensei, a computer science professor at Tulane University. A week later, I was sitting in a conference room with him, discussing my background and my research ideas. "You can come to class this Saturday if you want, I already notified all the teachers that you are going to join us," he said. His comment took me by surprise. In a matter of two weeks, I went from having no specific project to what seemed to be an outstanding research opportunity. A couple of weeks later, I was asking the seven participants of this study to work with me on this exploration of the Japanese language education of their children.

During my fieldwork at the Japanese Weekend School of New Orleans (hereafter JWSNO), I discovered that there is a strong sense of diasporic nationalism that resonates in the minds of not only the participants of this study, but the majority of the individuals involved with the school. The issue of diasporic nationalism was brought to me by one of the parents at the school. I was explaining the core of this project when she said: "Speaking Japanese is all we have. It's how we connect to Japan." In this thesis, I argue that this person's comment reflected

² Pseudonym.

the sentiment shared by the parents featured in this project. That is the fact that by teaching at and being members of the JWSNO these individuals have created a home away from home and established a link to Japanese society. Diasporic nationalism, a concept introduced by Benedict Anderson in his best-seller *Imagined Communities*, refers to a set of identity claims and practices that connect people living in various geographical areas to what they consider to be their home (Anderson 1983). Diasporic nationalists usually organize themselves with the purpose of creating “cultural or social projects that promote the interest of the members of the diasporic population where they have settled” (Schiller 2005:71). This thesis, then, examines the constant efforts of seven individuals to maintain ties and connections to their home country through language instruction as well as the resources used by these parents, their motivations for teaching Japanese both at home and the school, and the challenges they face in both settings, and how language instruction and school membership relate to diasporic nationalism. I explore these issues through two lines of evidence: Interviews with teachers and ethnographic observations of classes conducted from March to November of 2017. In what follows, I provide a background of Japanese immigration to the United States and the origins of Japanese language education in this country.

I. Japanese Immigrants in the United States

The first Japanese immigrants in America, known as the *Issei*, did not emigrate directly to the mainland United States, but to Hawaii when the territory was not yet controlled by the U.S (Dewey 2016). The first *Issei* arrived in Honolulu on board the steamship *City of Tokio* in 1885 (ibid). Their emigration was subsidized by the Hawaiian government as it needed a source of cheap labor to work on sugar plantations (Contino 2003:22). Despite all the harsh conditions linked to working at the plantations, more and more *Issei* began to settle in Hawaii and by 1890 the Japanese were the largest ethnic group in the island (Contino 2003:22). Emigration of Japanese directly to the mainland United States began in the mid-1880s when “student-laborers” or *dekasegi-chosei* landed in San Francisco, California (Ichioka 1988:8). Contrary to Japanese students sent to the U.S. by the Meiji government—which fully funded their education—these student-laborers paid for their studies. Their purpose was to learn English and acquire skills and knowledge that they could later apply in professional settings in Japan (Ichioka 1988:8). Although they had no intention of settling in the U.S., many student-laborers ultimately did so.

In the 1890s, Japanese laborers from Hawaii and Japan started arriving in the United States’ West Coast (Kitano 1969:7). This influx of laborers increased in 1900 when Hawaii became an official territory of the United States. The labor contract system that Hawaiian plantations owners used was quickly categorized as illegitimate under U.S. law and Japanese contract laborers were given the freedom to decide where they wanted to work (Contino 2003:22) and many of them decided to move to the mainland. This trend continued until 1924 when Congress passed the 1924 Immigration Act, which abruptly stopped the flow of immigrants from Asian countries into the United States. This legislation regulated “all immigration to the United States by establishing a quota system based upon national origins”

(Ichioka 1988: 244). One of the main arguments used by those who supported the 1924 Exclusion Act was that Japanese and other Asian peoples living in the United States would never become Americanized because of the language barrier (Kitagawa 1967:8). Although there were several reasons behind the *Issei*'s difficulty in speaking English, the most evident one was the fact that they were confined to Japanese immigrant communities, which made even more difficult the task of mastering the English language. Indeed, for the *Issei* "home was security after the daily struggle of making a living in a white man's world where the language was difficult and strange" (Hosokawa 1969: 153). The 1924 Immigration Act, coupled with other policies, exacerbated the confinement of the *Issei* and their children, known as the *Nisei*³, and pushed them further into segregated communities that were copybook reproductions of the Japan they left behind.

In the years leading up to World War II, the *Nisei* went through tough stages of acculturation and started to identify themselves as American. Nevertheless, life in the United States continued to be marked by discrimination and hardship. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, was the last piece needed to fill the puzzle of aversion toward Japanese and Japanese-Americans. On February 19, 1942, President Theodore Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which authorized the building of relocation camps to house over 100,000 Japanese individuals (Kitano 1969:32). This evacuation forced Japanese people in America to evaluate their sense of ethnic and national belonging. As Kitano argues, "prior to the evacuation, one could dream of being an "American" ... or deny that one was a hyphenated citizen" (1969:38). Several scholars have explored the intricacies of this issue and how Japanese and Japanese-Americans were forced to reevaluate and deconstruct their ethnic and national

³ Although *Nisei* translates literally as "second-generation Japanese," it is worth noting that they were in fact the first Japanese individuals to be born in America.

identities (Kitagawa 1967; Kitano 1969; Wyatt 2012). During the first year of the war, most *Nisei* were banned from enlisting in the military. Service boards rejected them and classified them as “unsuited for service because of race or ancestry” (Wyatt 2012:17). There were certain exceptional cases, such as bilingual *Nisei* who served as language instructors and translators (Wyatt 2012:18).

Throughout the internment period, the War Relocation Authority or WRA handled the relocation and detention of Japanese and Japanese-Americans. The language gap previously discussed between the *Issei* and the *Nisei* continued to grow at internment camps as the use of the Japanese language was banned by the WRA (Wyatt 2012:42). According to Barbara Wyatt, a clear example of this yawning gap was the fact that all council meetings at internment camps had to be conducted in English and all newsletters and other publications had to be written in English as well (ibid). On February 1, 1943, President Roosevelt amended Executive Order 9099 by declaring that “Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race or ancestry... Every loyal American should be given the opportunity to serve this country” (Wyatt 2012:46). When the military was reopened to *Nisei* men, almost 10,000 from Hawaii volunteered and over 2,600 were accepted (ibid). In contrast, out of all relocation camps in the mainland fewer than 1,500 *Nisei* volunteered (Wyatt 2012:47). Japanese-American women were also able to join military institutions, such as the Women’s Army Corps, where they worked as nurses and translators (Wyatt 2012:50).

It was not until 1946 that the Japanese started to become part of the mainstream of American society again (Kitano 1969:47). Although prewar and wartime anti-Japanese sentiments still lingered, the passing of the McCarran-Walter Immigration Bill in 1952 favored the Japanese. This law “provided an opportunity for naturalization and eventual citizenship for

the *Issei* and a token quota for Japanese immigration” (ibid). As years went by, popular feeling began to support the Japanese, limitations on immigration decreased, and more Japanese found themselves attracted to American society.

II. Japanese Language Education in the United States

Japanese language instruction in America began in Hawaii in the 1890s since the first *Issei* settled there and later on expanded to the United States' West Coast (Doerr and Lee 2010:195). The *Nisei* used Japanese during their preschool years. However, upon entering Hawaiian/American schools the use of Japanese started to decline as the *Nisei* shifted to English as their main form of communication (Hosokawa 1969:154). In order to maintain the language outside of the home environment, the *Issei* decided to enroll their children in Japanese supplementary schools. The schools were sponsored by groups within Japanese communities, with parents paying a couple of dollars each month (Kitano 1969:25). These schools were very popular in both Hawaii and the West Coast from 1930 until the wartime evacuation.

During the war, the schools were closed as speaking Japanese was seen as a threat to U.S. security. After the war, several other schools were founded as Japanese and Japanese-Americans settled beyond the West Coast and Japanese immigrants started to arrive in the United States once again. Japan's economic boom in the 1960s allowed companies to send many employees and their families to the U.S. for short-term assignments. The Japanese Weekend Schools or *hoshūkō* described in this thesis were established for the children of these individuals. The schools were designed to serve temporary Japanese residents so that, upon returning to Japan, their children could easily re-adapt to its educational system. Over time, the schools started educating different categories of children based on their length of stay in the U.S.

Japanese Weekend Schools provide part of the education received by children in Japan and usually hold classes on Saturdays or Sundays. The lessons studied by children in Japan over the course of a week are compressed into three or four hours of education by teachers in America. The main subject taught at these schools is *kokugo* or standard Japanese. Some schools might offer mathematics and art courses as well. Japanese Weekend Schools normally offer

classes from 1st through 9th grade. Sometimes, they also offer pre-k and kindergarten programs. When the number of students enrolled in these schools reaches a hundred, the Japanese government provides a subsidy that covers both teachers' salaries and the rent of the buildings where classes are held (Doerr and Lee 2010:195). Otherwise, schools must rely on tuition and partial government subsidy to function. The curriculum and books used at these schools have been certified by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT).

III. The Japanese Community in New Orleans, Louisiana

According to folklorist Laura Westbrook, the first reported *Issei* to settle in New Orleans

was Tomematsu Himata, who arrived on April 1, 1904 (Westbrook 2011). Himata opened an import-export shop, the Japanese Art Store, in the French Quarter. The store remained open until December 8, 1941, the day after the bombing of Pearl Harbor (ibid). Westbrook suggests that besides Himata's shop records, only anecdotal evidence remains regarding the presence of other Japanese people in New Orleans until some of the *Issei* and *Nisei* that were interned during the war decided to relocate to the city. Even after the war, the Japanese community in New Orleans continued to be a small one. It was not until 1950 that the population increased to comprise approximately 130 people (ibid). At the time of the 2000 census, "the total population of Japanese residents in Louisiana amounted to 1519 individuals" (ibid). The Japanese and Japanese-American population have continued to grow each year, as Japanese immigrants move to New Orleans for personal and professional reasons. New Orleans, then, is home to Japanese and Japanese-Americans of all ages, from various areas of Japan, and culturally-blended families.

Despite regional and cultural differences, there is a well-established sense of community among Japanese and Japanese-Americans living in the greater New Orleans area and several organizations foster communication between both groups. The JCNO is predominantly Japanese-American and includes *Issei*, *Nisei*, *Sansei* (third-generation), and *Yonsei* (fourth generation). It publishes a monthly newsletter in both English and Japanese that includes information about community activities and advertisements for Japanese restaurants, among other features. In contrast, the JSNO is mostly comprised of Americans and individuals of other nationalities interested in Japanese popular culture and US-Japan cultural relationships. The JSNO organizes several monthly activities which include but are not limited to: *Nihongo-bin*, an event in which members have an opportunity to discuss a specific aspect of Japanese culture; *Kwaidan* Book

Club, in which members read and discuss a Japan-related book; and *Nihongo Renshū*, a casual learning experience for people wanting to learn Japanese. There are other groups such as the Greater New Orleans Bonsai Society and the Japanese Garden Foundation of New Orleans which are largely non-Asian.

There are two annual events at which Japanese traditions are presented to the New Orleanian public. The *O-Bon* festival is celebrated in the summer, usually in July or August. This festival is of great significance in Japan and symbolizes the welcoming of the souls of ancestors. The most notable aspect of this festival is *Bon Odori*, a folk dance. Each year, the Japanese community in New Orleans offers an *O-Bon* program that includes martial arts and traditional dance performances. The second event is the largest annual celebration of Japanese culture in the Gulf South and takes place each fall. This event, called Japan Fest, features dance performances, martial arts demonstrations, and information tables for several Japan-related organizations, among others. Japan Fest or *Nihon Matsuri* is a day in which members of the school sell Japanese crafts and traditional Japanese products, such as *furoshiki*⁴, *tenugui*⁵, and *haori*⁶ (figure 1). The women that run or participate at the JWSNO make all the crafts. Japan Fest's social benefits for the JWSNO are astonishing. It provides an avenue for relationship building between Japanese people who have been living in New Orleans for years and those who have just arrived. Additionally, this festival symbolizes the creation of bonds among public organizations and neighborhood groups. Japan Fest is also a day for these parents to foster community pride and strengthen relationships with other members of the Gulf South's Japanese community.

⁴ A type of Japanese wrapping cloth used to transport food, gifts, clothes, and other goods.

⁵ A thin Japanese towel made of cotton used for-as a washcloth, headband, souvenir, or decoration.

⁶ A traditional Japanese kimono-like jacket.



Figure 1. *The JWSNO table at Japan Fest in 2013. Courtesy of the JWSNO.*

For the children, this festival is an event that reflects Japanese history and values. On March 9th, 2017, I was sitting in Himura-sensei's class when we started talking about *samurai*. Himura-sensei explained the history of these fierce warriors and how they protected Japan from attacks and enforced the country's laws. The children were impressed by Himura-sensei's rendition. One of them said: "I wish I could see a *samurai* armor one day." On October 14th, 2017, the Japan Society of New Orleans hosted a *samurai* suit try-on at the second floor of the New Orleans Museum of Art during Japan Fest. One of the "*samurais*," decided to take a stroll in the museum's sculpture garden, where the JWSNO had their tent. Upon seeing the "*samurai*" the children rounded-up and said to each other: "*Mite! Mite! Sugoi desu ne!*" (Look! Look! That's great!). This is one of many examples of Japan Fest's instructional force and how it provides an avenue for Japanese people in New Orleans to present their heritage to the public and inculcate traditional values.

One of New Orleans biggest connections with Japan comes from Lafcadio Hearn. Hearn

(1850-1904) was a journalist, essayist, and novelist. He was born in Greece to a Greek mother and an Irish father, raised in Ireland, studied in France and England, and spent his last fourteen years in the city of Matsue, Japan (LaBarre 2007:195). When Hearn was nineteen years old, he visited the United States and stayed for a decade in New Orleans (ibid). During his time in the city, Hearn wrote about Creole contemporary life for *The Daily Item* and later for *The Times-Democrat* (McQuaid 2001). Hearn left New Orleans in 1887 and headed for Martinique, where Harper's Weekly magazine⁷ offered to send him to Japan to write a series of articles (ibid). Hearn settled in Matsue in 1890 and set out to write books about Japanese ghost legends in English, such as *Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things*.

In the United States, Hearn is often revered as the first Western interpreter of Japanese folklore. He is a symbol of friendship between New Orleanians and Japanese people and his legacy is an important part of the JSNO, which organizes the New Orleans-Matsue Tomodachi Exchange program, an initiative that seeks to foster relationships between these two cities. In August 2014, the first group of participants from Matsue arrived in New Orleans and stayed for ten days (Japan Society). In October 2015, the Japan Society sent eight Americans to Matsue. Currently, the JSNO is raising funds to support the next stage of this exchange program. Additionally, the JSNO's book club was named after Lafcadio Hearn's book, *Kwaidan*.

IV. Research Context: The Japanese Weekend School of New Orleans

Unknown to most people living in New Orleans, the JWSNO has a long and compelling

⁷ Based in New York City.

history. Founded in 1973, the school initially offered classes at Loyola University on Saturdays from 9:00 am to noon. In an article published in 1990, journalist Tina Soong described that the MEXT supported the school by sending textbooks and partially subsidizing teacher's salaries. The Japanese Overseas Educational Services, in contrast, donated materials and equipment to the school (Soong 1990). Hiroshi Satoh, the chairman interviewed in this article, stated that the school had two goals: To help children who would go back to Japan after their parent's company assignments were finished to maintain and improve their language and to help students permanently living in the United States "assimilate their heritage through language" (Soong 1990).

After Hurricane Katrina swept through New Orleans, the school faced many challenges. In 2008, Soong published another piece on the JWSNO titled "*Japanese School Going Strong.*" This newspaper article explored the decrease in enrollment experimented by the school due to the relocation of many families. At that time, the JWSNO had twenty-four students and seven teachers. One parent explained that although many families had to leave, the school remained strong because "the New Orleans Japanese community [understood] the importance of the continued education of Japanese language and culture to their children" (Soong 2007). This attitude continues nowadays, as parents still organize all aspects of the school. During the seven months that I visited the school, I recorded most of the roles that these parents fulfill in my field notes. Some of them include moving furniture, folding chairs at the end of class, carpooling, cleaning classrooms and common areas, making crafts to sell at Japan Fest, and creating a yearly photo book (figure 2).



Figure 2. Some pages from the 2016-17 Photobook.

For the past couple of years, the JWSNO has been renting classrooms at the Waldorf School of New Orleans, located in the heart of the Irish Channel Neighborhood. According to Shinobu-san, the chairman of the school for the 2017-2018 school year, the JWSNO had an enrollment of approximately fifty-three students and eight teachers during this period. These students are categorized as *chuzai*, living temporarily in the U.S. due to their parent's company assignments, and *eiju* or permanent residents. The *eiju* form the bulk of the students at the school and, in most cases, they are the children of international marriages in which one of the parents is not a speaker of Japanese. The JWSNO continues to be a private-nonprofit organization financed by tuitions and the MEXT, which partially subsidizes rent and teachers' salaries. The school meets every Saturday of the year except for American holidays and summer vacations. The school has kept its schedule and curriculum, offering classes on Saturdays from 9:00 am to noon and covering pre-k/kindergarten through 7th grade.

It took me approximately three Saturdays to become acquainted with all the teachers' names and the grades they taught. As for the parents, virtually none of them knew what my presence at the school meant. Most of, if not all, the women that teach and attend the school are

Japanese. Thus, the presence of a *gaijin*⁸ woman they had never seen before was undoubtedly strange. After Shinobu-san explained my research at the 2017-18 school year celebration held on March 8th, some of the women started to approach me and inquired about my background. They were eager to know if I was half Japanese and to understand why I was interested in Japanese culture. The fact that I was able to carry out basic conversations in Japanese surprised them. One woman told me: “You must really love our culture; otherwise you wouldn’t be learning our language.” Many women apologized for having difficulty to communicate in English. In my first interviews with them, I made sure to say: “*Watashi no bokokugo wa eigo dewa arimasen dakara, kinchou shinaide kudasai*” (English is not my mother language, so please, do not worry). These words were often met with big smiles and I could see the tension on their faces going away.

As Saturdays went by, the parents felt more comfortable around me and curious looks were replaced by “*ohayou gozaimasu!*” (good morning!). Sooner than later, all teachers and students, after labeling my first name as a “jawbreaker,” started calling me *Ameria-sensei*. Japanese honorifics are usually suffixes that imply status and relationship between the speaker and the person being spoken to. There are many different honorifics and their use depends on how formal or casual the situation is and how we rank the person we are speaking to. The children at the JWSNO learn from a very young age, both at the school and at home, that the levels of politeness in the English language are not as formalized or clearly defined as in Japanese. The first time I went into a classroom at the JWSNO, it was Himura-sensei’s class. His three students looked at me with a puzzled look until he explained that I was a researcher. Immediately after saying this, one of the children asked me a very specific question about this project. However, what caught me by surprise was the fact that she immediately assigned the

⁸ Foreigner.

honorific *sensei* to my name, a term used for teachers and instructors. Because I was immersed in this Japanese environment, I was also expected to use honorifics whenever I talked to someone. Like the children at the school, I was an active learner of the profoundly complex politeness of the Japanese language.

Parents at the school try to recreate a Japanese educational environment for the children. Throughout my fieldwork, I witnessed several events that attest to this. For example, it is customary at the school to play the Japanese national anthem at the first and last day of classes for each school year. Most teachers and parents follow along the lyrics and children are expected to either do the same or stand in silence. A traditional school song or *kouka* follows the national anthem. In the case of the JWSNO, their school song was recorded by a parent specifically for them, which shows a deeper sense of uniqueness. In my field notes, I recorded that the parents and the children displayed quite dissimilar attitudes toward both songs. While the national anthem, called *kimigayo* or “may the Emperor’s reign last forever” was only sung by the parents, the school’s song had a livelier tone and provided an opportunity for the children to grab each other’s hands, clap, dance, and sing the lyrics alongside their parents and teachers.

V. The Parents/Teachers

Between March and October of 2017, I conducted semi-structured interviews with seven individuals. Interviews ranged from fifteen to forty-five minutes and were conducted primarily in English except for one which was mostly in Japanese. The sample consisted of six women and one man who came from Japan as adults for a variety of reasons. There is only one male teacher at the JWSNO and he is featured in this project. The seven parents that participated in this study are considered *Shin-issei* or newly-arrived Japanese immigrants. The term “new” is relative in this case since some of these parents have been living in the United States for more than 25 years. However, the term *Issei* is reserved for the Japanese immigrants that arrived in the United States and other parts of the Americas in the pre-World War II period.

I obtained written consent forms from all the parents and school administrators that agreed to participate in this study. All teachers were asked the same questions and were given the freedom to reply either in English or Japanese. Throughout this section I will refer to them by a pseudonym, followed by the Japanese honorific *sensei*. I will also use pseudonyms for the names of their children. The sample was a convenient one, made up of individuals who were available and comfortable with participating in this research. Participants were recruited with the aid of Shinobu-san, who contacted them by means of email and explained the full scope of this project in Japanese.

Although the research was conducted mainly in English, my level of Japanese allowed me to carry out participant observation in classrooms and switch to Japanese during interviews if the interviewee did not understand the questions in English. I observed approximately fifteen class sessions during my intermittent fieldwork with the purpose of comparing the practices

described by the participants in their interviews with their teaching methods in the classroom, to document their use of English, and to see how they teach culture through language. In what follows I introduce each *sensei*, their reasons for moving to America, and their perspectives on the Japanese language education of their children.

Mikami-sensei

Mikami-sensei is a native of Gunma prefecture. Her husband was a participant in the famous Japanese Exchange Teaching (JET) program and was sent to Japan to teach English in the 1990s. They lived in between Japan and the U.S. for some time until they decided to settle in America. Besides teaching at the JWSNO, Mikami-sensei works at Tulane University's Newcomb Children's Center. She has a son and a daughter. In her interview, Mikami-sensei disclosed that she left Japan because she couldn't fit in there well:

Everybody dresses the same way, and everyone expects you to be amazing. Standards are very high, and I couldn't fit in there, mentally and emotionally. My husband loves my background and my culture even more than I do. He encourages me to keep my culture alive, that's one of the reasons why I teach Japanese to my children.

In another occasion, Mikami-sensei expressed that teaching Japanese to her children is tiresome but necessary since she wants her children to be able to recognize Japan as one of their homes. In her interview, Mikami-sensei explained that her son used to attend the school but dropped out because he could not catch up to his *kanji*⁹ study.

⁹ Chinese ideographs adopted by the Japanese to use in their writing system alongside two distinct syllabaries. Each *kanji* conveys a meaning rather than a sound.

My son couldn't read, write, or recognize *kanji*. During the summer we don't hold classes at the school, but all teachers give homework to their students. My son came up to me one day and said: "This is my summer vacation; I'm not going to do homework." And if he's not making an effort, then he can't come to school. I don't know if it's a "boy thing" or his age but if I push him to study Japanese he will ignore me. If I don't even mention it, he'll show interest. For example, he'll ask me to watch Japanese shows with him and things like that. Whenever my parents tell him that he should keep practicing so that he can continue communicating in Japanese with them, he'll work on his Japanese. He even completes *kanji* workbooks if my parents ask him.

Mikami-sensei also disclosed that she chose to give her son the opportunity to decide whether or not he wanted to attend the school because she does not believe that children should be forced to do things against their will. Her son continues to practice Japanese at home.

The primary language at Mikami-sensei's house is English. However, whenever her children are doing Japanese study or watching Japanese shows she tries to speak in Japanese. "The biggest problem is that when they start talking to me in English, I will reply in English," she said. Mikami-sensei mentioned that lately, she has been working with her daughter to help her improve her speaking skills.

Every week, we video chat with my parents. They're in Japan and they don't speak English at all. My son can carry out a conversation, but my daughter can only listen. She understands everything; she just can't form any sentences. When we were living in Japan, we used English in the house all the time. Now, I'm trying to do the opposite and it's very difficult for her to understand that change.

Also, she just started kindergarten at an American school so, she speaks English more often.

Because Mikami-sensei and her husband switch between English and Japanese in the home environment, their children usually do it as well. When they lived in Japan, the family placed more emphasis on the father's native language. Ever since the family moved to New Orleans, they have switched to Japanese. This, coupled with the fact that the children are being raised in an English-predominant household, is the reason why whenever her children cannot understand a concept in Japanese, Mikami-sensei finds it easier to explain it to them in English. However, Mikami-sensei avoids code-switching at the school: "If I speak in English to my students, they are going to reply in English and I don't want that because I'm here to teach them Japanese," she explained. In the seven months that I conducted fieldwork, I heard Mikami-sensei use a word in English only once. She was explaining how to make fake *kakigōri*¹⁰ with cotton balls and crepe paper. Out of all the children in her class, only one knew what *kakigōri* were. He looked at her and said: *Esunoboru ne?* (snowballs?) And Mikami-sensei replied: "Hai, snowballs" (Yes, snowballs).

When asked about teaching methods at home, Mikami-sensei mentioned that her children love watching *anime*¹¹ and that both she and her husband often encourage their children to watch Japanese TV and other types of Japanese shows. Like many other teachers at the school, Mikami-sensei started teaching at the JWSNO after a parent, who was aware of her background as a teacher, contacted her and prompted her to apply.

¹⁰ Shaved-ice; snowballs.

¹¹ Japanese cartoons.

I had been teaching at pre-schools and daycares for many years and they were looking for a pre-k teacher. It was because I got a job here that I decided to enroll my kids at this school. My daughter loves coming here, and I truly enjoy teaching.

Nagata-sensei

Nagata-sensei is a native of Kagoshima, located in Japan's Kyushu Prefecture. Nagata-sensei's interview was the only one carried out in both Japanese and English. She is married to an American, this being the reason why she moved to the U.S. At the time of our interview, Nagata-sensei was only working at the JWSNO. Nagata-sensei has two children. She mentioned that she speaks in Japanese to them because she wants them to be able to communicate with them her native language. She also mentioned that speaking Japanese will give her children better career opportunities in the future.

Nagata-sensei thinks a lot about her oldest son refusing to speak Japanese at some point and said that she speaks in Japanese to him all the time. "It's easy for my son to speak English not only because his father is American but also because he goes to an American school," she explained. "During the summer vacation, however, I have the chance to reinforce Japanese study and my son gets really good at it! I think that for his age, he has a good level of Japanese." Nagata-sensei usually reads Japanese stories to her children and helps her oldest son with his homework, the youngest one being an infant. She also plays Japanese music whenever they are together in the car and watches Japanese TV with him. Nagata-sensei is confident that by speaking in Japanese to her oldest son and taking him to the JWSNO, he will become fluent. She expects the same results with her other son.

When I asked her why she taught at the JWSNO, Nagata-sensei had difficulty replying:

Lorvelis: *Naze hoshūkō de oshieru?* (Why do you teach at this school?)

Nagata: *Naze?... Hmmm, naze?* [long pause] *Watashi ha nihonjin to... nihongo wo shabereru ka.* (Why?... Hmmm, why? I am Japanese and... I can speak Japanese).

L: *Hoshūkō de oshie wo tanoshinde imasu ka?* (Do you enjoy teaching at the school?).

N: *Hai, sou desu.* (Yes, I do).

Even though Nagata-sensei found it complicated to explain exactly *why* she teaches at the JWSNO, she shares the same ideal of other parents. That is, speaking Japanese will help her children *act* Japanese. Nagata-sensei feels that while learning Japanese, her children will also learn culturally appropriate behaviors. In doing so, they will perform adequately whenever they interact with other Japanese individuals.

Murakami-sensei

Murakami-sensei is a native of northern Saitama prefecture. In 2006, she married an American from Houma, Louisiana. They met in Japan while he was teaching with the JET program. Her husband speaks Japanese fluently. Besides teaching at the JWSNO, Murakami-sensei works as a personal trainer in Houma. She has one daughter, Haru, who is five years old. According to Murakami-sensei, they speak a “half and half” mix of Japanese and English at home. “At home, I always speak in Japanese to Haru. I also try to get my husband to speak in Japanese to her,” she said.

When asked about the reasons behind her desire to teach Japanese to her daughter, Murakami-sensei emphasized that she wants Haru to be able to speak in Japanese because she *is* Japanese. Murakami-sensei expects her daughter to be fluent in both English and Japanese because she is a “mixed-child.” In doing so, she is unknowingly connecting the process of

learning a language to the development of ethnic and cultural identity. Furthermore, the family goes back to Japan every summer to visit Murakami-sensei's parents and friends. Thus, she wants her daughter to develop good language skills to effectively communicate with her Japanese family since they don't speak English at all.

Murakami-sensei is an active member of the Japanese diasporic community in New Orleans and commutes every Saturday from Houma to the school because she considers it to be an essential component of her daughter's language education.

We live far away from New Orleans and we never see Japanese people in Houma.

I honestly believe there is just one other family living there. That's why I like to bring Haru to this school. I know it's just once a week but that's better than not seeing Japanese people at all.

Murakami-sensei thinks that Haru will become fluent in Japanese but that in order to do so she must continue attending the JWSNO and practicing the language with her parents. "I think that the trip to Japan also helps a lot because I enroll her in summer school while we're there. She gets to see friends and practice the language with locals, which is good. The trip to Japan is also very important for Haru because it keeps her interested in my culture, *our culture*," she explained. At home, Murakami-sensei plays Japanese music frequently and watches Japanese TV with her daughter. She also tries to read bedtime stories in Japanese most evenings. Additionally, she likes to play Japanese instruction videos for Haru. Whenever Haru can't remember a specific word in Japanese, Murakami-sensei will say it in English. Afterwards, she will teach Haru the Japanese counterpart and prompt her to use it in conversations so that she can remember it, a pattern that Haru follows often. In her interview, Murakami-sensei confessed that she is truly scared about Haru refusing to speak Japanese in the future:

Murakami: I feel like it's coming.

Lorvelis: What exactly do you feel?

M: You know...that she will refuse to speak in Japanese at some point; I don't want that...

Subsequently, I asked Murakami-sensei what would happen if Haru refuses to speak Japanese later in her life. She looked at me with a thoughtful look and said: "That will be her choice. For now, I'll keep teaching her." Murakami-sensei used to be a teacher in Japan and said that it seemed "natural" for her to teach at the JWSNO as well. I mentioned that there are a lot of Japanese people that attend the school but do not teach and asked her why she was so compelled to do it. Murakami-sensei was not able to unpack her response. However, I would argue that Murakami-sensei believes that teaching Japanese at the school works perfectly for her because she has both a passion for teaching and a desire to give back to her community. In the classroom, Murakami-sensei avoids the use of English and technology. She usually prints handouts for her students to practice their *kanji*. At home, nonetheless, she often uses her iPad to show Haru the stroke order of certain characters with an application that assigns different colors to each stroke, which according to her makes the learning process "fun and interesting."

Kamiya-sensei

Kamiya-sensei was born and raised in Tokyo and came to America when she was sixteen years old as a high school exchange student. She decided to stay afterward to pursue a bachelor's degree at the University of New Orleans. She went back to Japan for a while and then came back and married an American. Besides teaching at the JWSNO, Kamiya-sensei is an accountant at the New Orleans City Hall. She has two daughters, Anna and Chikako. According to Kamiya-sensei, they speak Japanese and English equally at home. Kamiya-sensei follows the one-on-one

language model, meaning that she strictly speaks in Japanese to her daughters. In fact, whenever they talk to her in English, Kamiya-sensei pretends she doesn't understand. "As far as my daughters know, I can't speak English very well," she said while we both laughed. Kamiya-sensei's feelings toward teaching Japanese have evolved throughout the years:

I started teaching Japanese to my kids so that they could communicate with my parents and the rest of my family in Japan since none of them speak English that well. My daughters' level of Japanese is quite good already, so we could leave the school if we wanted but they truly want to be here.

Surprised by Kamiya-sensei's statement that the only reason why she is still teaching at the school is that her daughters are enrolled there, I asked her to expand on her answer and she kindly did so.

My daughters grew up here and have friends here. They've been part of this school for such a long time and they love coming here, especially Anna. Also, they go to Japan every summer. Chikako understands that in order to keep enjoying that experience she needs to come to school and practice Japanese with her classmates. So, for me, it's not about my feelings toward the school, it's just that my daughters want to be a part of it. Being here is a lot of commitment, parents operate the school and do everything. It's a lot of work for me, especially because I have another job. But for my daughters, I'll do it.

Subsequently, I asked Kamiya-sensei if she felt like both her and her daughters were accepted at the school, to which she replied: "That was my biggest concern when we first joined this school." She took a deep breath and continued:

It was a lot of pressure; I didn't want people to think that we were bringing down the level of this school because my daughters are Japanese-Americans. Anna and I had to work really hard. All the kids that started school with her dropped out because they couldn't handle the workload, Anna was the only one that survived. The pressure was there eight years ago, but I think it was all in my mind. We all feel accepted here. I wanted my daughters to have my support, and so I joined this school. I want to be a part of their journey, she said with a sweet smile.

Kamiya-sensei is confident that her daughters will be fluent in Japanese after they graduate from the JWSNO but that to keep that fluency, she must continue speaking in Japanese to them. Furthermore, both of her daughters are deeply interested in their Japanese language education and do not see it as a burden.

Kamiya-sensei's oldest daughter has surprised her several times in the past couple of months.

Every year, I take my daughters to Japan and leave them there with their grandparents. One day, after they came back from Japan, I wanted to eat out and so, I told them "*soto de gohan taberu,*" (let's eat outside) and then Anna said: "*gaishoku ne?*"¹². Later on, when we were already at the restaurant, Anna wanted to try what was on my plate and she said "*chotto itadaku wa?*" (can I try a little bit?). You hear those expressions from adults and people that live in Japan. I didn't know she could talk like that! I think I've underestimated her abilities; I should be treating her like an adult... I should trust her more.

¹² Colloquial way of saying "eating out."

One of the benefits of sending off her daughters to Japan during the summer is that they can participate in language socialization experiences that might not be accessible to them in the United States. Learning colloquialisms can be taken as an example of these advantages. When asked about home literacy practices, Kamiya-sensei mentioned that she subscribed to Japan TV so that her daughters could watch Japanese TV shows often because they portray facets of Japan that they can use to better understand their culture. Since she likes to use books to teach, Kamiya-sensei checks out some from the JWSNO library and orders others online. While she uses some electronic devices at home, Kamiya-sensei does not bring them into the classroom. Instead, she prints images from the internet and hands them out in class. She makes an exception with audio devices, which she uses sometimes.

Maruyama-sensei

Maruyama-sensei was born and raised in Southern Saitama prefecture. She came to the United States when she was eighteen years old to pursue a bachelor's degree in education. After her graduation, she moved to New Orleans and got a master's degree in Special Education from the University of New Orleans. She decided to stay in America after getting her first job as a teacher. Sometime later, she married an American from Orlando, Florida. Maruyama-sensei has been teaching at public schools since 1998. She currently teaches at McDonogh 35 High School, a local school in New Orleans. Maruyama-sensei's husband has very basic Japanese skills: "My husband can say *ohayou*, *arigatou*, and *hajimemashite*¹³. He tries really hard, that's what matters!" she said while laughing. They have two sons, Yukio and Kiyoshi.

The primary language at Maruyama-sensei's home is English. "I would say that 90% of the time we speak English and the other 10% is a constant struggle to use Japanese at our house,"

¹³ Good morning, thank you, pleased to meet you.

she explained. When Yukio was younger, they mixed English and Japanese often at home. However, after Kiyoshi was born Maruyama-sensei found herself speaking English more frequently. During our interview, Maruyama-sensei stated that she strictly speaks in Japanese to her children:

Over the years, I've noticed with both my kids and my students, that as they grow older most of them switch to English. When Yukio was younger, for example, he would reply in Japanese but now he replies in English most of the time. I don't know why; I just know that I won't stop teaching them Japanese.

Yukio identifies English as his dominant language both at home and at the school. In class, it is often normal to hear him say "what!?" whenever he does not understand a concept. Furthermore, during my fieldwork Yukio was enrolled in the very same grade her mother was teaching and would often ask her, in English, about certain concepts, potentially expecting her to reply in English. However, Maruyama-sensei never speaks English in her classes.

When asked about her motivations to teach Japanese to her children, Maruyama-sensei said:

I think it's because I'm Japanese, which makes them Japanese too. To me, it wasn't a choice, you know, like something I had to think about. It feels natural to teach them Japanese. I want them to be able to speak Japanese with me and with my family in Japan. We go back every summer and they have many friends in Japan. I try to keep them motivated so that when we're in Japan they can truly enjoy communicating with their family and friends.

On another occasion, Maruyama-sensei mentioned that teaching Japanese to her children is a way for her to reconnect to Japan. She also told me that her Japanese heritage is one

of the most important things in her life and that she wants her children to feel that same love for Japanese culture. Maruyama-sensei believes that reading and writing instruction at the school is not enough for her kids:

I have to make sure that a lot of things are done at home. I'm a full-time teacher but I always try to find time to practice reading and writing with them. One day a week at this school is not enough. They see English words all over, wherever they go, but they don't see Japanese words in the street. So, it's getting harder... it's getting harder.

Here, Maruyama-sensei described not only how she perceives the challenge of teaching Japanese to her children in America but her own struggles as well. Speaking in Japanese with Yukio and Kiyoshi symbolizes a way for her to neglect the English words she “sees all over” and enjoy communicating in her native language. At this point in the conversation, Maruyama-sensei looked down and stopped talking for a couple of seconds. When she looked at me again, she said: “Speaking is easier for my kids. They might not be able to read *kanji* but if someone else reads it to them, they'll understand. We just have to keep working on it,” she concluded.

Besides helping them with their homework and giving them extra assignments, Maruyama-sensei often plays Japanese music and invites her children to watch Japanese TV with her. She explained that some evenings she is way too exhausted to do anything, but that most of the time she tries to read bedtime stories in Japanese since both Yukio and Kiyoshi enjoy them very much. Maruyama-sensei started teaching at the JWSNO about three years before Hurricane Katrina. After that, she stopped teaching for a while. She came back in 2014 as the school was experiencing a teacher shortage. Although teaching at the JWSNO only takes three hours of her

time, Maruyama-sensei is constantly under pressure, a sentiment shared by the rest of the teachers and parents since the school is maintained by them.

In her classes, Maruyama-sensei is always encouraging her students to speak only in Japanese. Thus, it is very common to hear her say “*Nihongo dake!*” (Japanese only!) countless times during class. Some of the children follow her lead and whenever they hear a classmate speaking in English they will say “*Dame! Nihongo dake!*” (Stop! Japanese only!). Most of the children in Maruyama sensei’s class often spoke in Japanese to me, it was only during breaks and when teachers were not around that they switched to English. Maruyama-sensei uses technology in class sometimes. For example, she might use her smartphone to show videos to her students. One time, the children were reading a poem that was related to a very famous Japanese song. She played the song on YouTube and encouraged the children to follow along with the lyrics.

Himura-sensei

Himura-sensei is the only male teacher at the JWSNO and the only teacher married to a Japanese person. He was born and raised in Tokyo, Japan, and his wife is from Tokyo as well. After getting his bachelor and doctorate degrees from Japan, he moved to England where he lived for three years before coming to the United States in 2001. Himura-sensei has one son and one daughter, and they are both graduates of the JWSNO. Himura-sensei held his first research position in America at the University of Michigan, where he specialized in biomedical engineering, and moved to New Orleans’ Tulane University in 2008 where he still works as a research professor in the computer science department.

According to Himura-sensei, the primary language at home has always been Japanese. “We taught our children Japanese because we wanted them to keep our heritage, their heritage,

alive. Also, my children are Japanese, so I expect them to speak the language and *feel* Japanese.” Himura-sensei, then, expects his children to recognize Japan as their home even though they have been living in the U.S. for quite some time. Himura-sensei’s children have never refused to speak in Japanese to their parents or among themselves. “When they were in *hoshūkō*,” he said, “they often had trouble with their homework, especially with the writing assignments, but speaking Japanese was never a problem for them. Even nowadays, I never hear my children speaking English among themselves.” Like many other teachers at the JWSNO, Himura-sensei believes that watching TV and listening to Japanese music are among the best language acquisition practices: “TV helps *a lot*,” he said with a big smile.

When we first moved to America, our internet connection was really bad. I remember we recorded Japanese TV shows whenever we could and played them again and again! I think my children memorized the shows. They enjoyed them a lot and would often discuss with us what they had seen in the shows. Also, they started using words and expressions that I know we never taught them. Besides that, we used to help them with their lessons and read many books in Japanese.

Himura-sensei explained that after they graduated from the JWSNO, his children still showed interest in learning new Japanese words. “Whenever they want to learn something new regarding Japanese language or maybe our culture, they look it up on the internet,” he explained. Before becoming a teacher at the JWSNO, Himura-sensei served as the chairman for four years¹⁴. Himura-sensei’s second chairman rotation finished at the same time his children graduated. Someone at the school asked him to stay and teach and he agreed. When I asked him why he decided to stay, he said that it felt like the right thing to do. Himura-sensei is described by other

¹⁴ Each chairman rotation lasts two years.

teachers as a good example of commitment. Like the rest of the teachers at the JWSNO, Himura-sensei feels compelled to help. Himura-sensei believes that the *Shin-issei* living in New Orleans are very lucky because they have access to the weekend school. He finished his interview by encouraging Japanese parents to enroll their children at the school and to accompany them on their journey as Japanese language learners.

This school is a great tool for parents because children get together with kids of their same age, so the vocabulary they learn is age appropriate. Also, our teachers try very hard not to use English in the classroom, which really helps the children understand that they are here to learn Japanese. Parents' commitment to bringing their kids to school, then, is very important. My best advice for parents is to give their children the opportunity to come to school and learn Japanese. We give our children the tools, it's up to them if they want to use them or not.

Shimamoto-sensei

Shimamoto-sensei is a native of Shizuoka prefecture. Besides teaching at the JWSNO, she is a theater teacher at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts, a martial artist, and yoga instructor. In 2005, Shimamoto-sensei married an American citizen but had to wait a year to move to the United States because of her green card paperwork. In the meantime, they went to Japan and held a ceremony for her family and friends. Her husband was born in France but moved to America when he was nineteen. They have two sons, Alexander and Gabriel, and they both attend the school. When asked about the primary language they use at home, Shimamoto-sensei smiled and said: "My husband speaks to the kids in English and French while I speak to them in Japanese. My husband and I speak to each other in English because he can't speak

Japanese.” In her interview, Shimamoto-sensei described her children as great kids that surprise her every day:

My sons are amazing; they switch languages so easily. They only speak in Japanese to me and whenever their father talks to them they immediately switch to French. I hope that they maintain their trilingual status.

After asking her if her children use code-switching constantly, Shimamoto-sensei remarked that her children never get confused between languages and do not mix Japanese, English, and French words in conversations with each of their parents. Shimamoto-sensei explained that she has never experienced the need to force her children to speak Japanese. “I’ve heard from some friends that when kids reach a certain age they refuse to speak the language, or they don’t like it in the same way they used to when they were younger.” At this point in the conversation, she paused and seemed troubled. “My youngest son just started coming to the school and his primary language is definitely Japanese. So, Alexander *must* speak in Japanese to his younger brother, otherwise, Gabriel will get confused.” After a couple of minutes, Shimamoto-sensei went back to her usual, energetic self. “I’m confident that my children will continue to speak to each other in Japanese and to me as well! It makes me very happy.” Shimamoto-sensei has several reasons for speaking in Japanese to her children and for enrolling them at the school:

Japanese is part of my heritage and therefore their heritage. I also want them to be able to communicate with my family in Japan. Also, I think that in the future, speaking Japanese will open more opportunities for them. More educated and more skilled individuals get better job opportunities. I want them to be well equipped as they go into the professional world.

When I asked her if she thought that by speaking in Japanese to her kids and taking them to school they would become fluent, Shimamoto-sensei took a deep breath and said:

Yes. It's really hard to teach them Japanese by myself. I think that this school is incredible because it is a more structured place for them to learn the language.

Kids in pre-k, for example, learn *hiragana* and *katakana*¹⁵ (figure 3). That helps me a lot because they are learning how to write our language from a very young age.

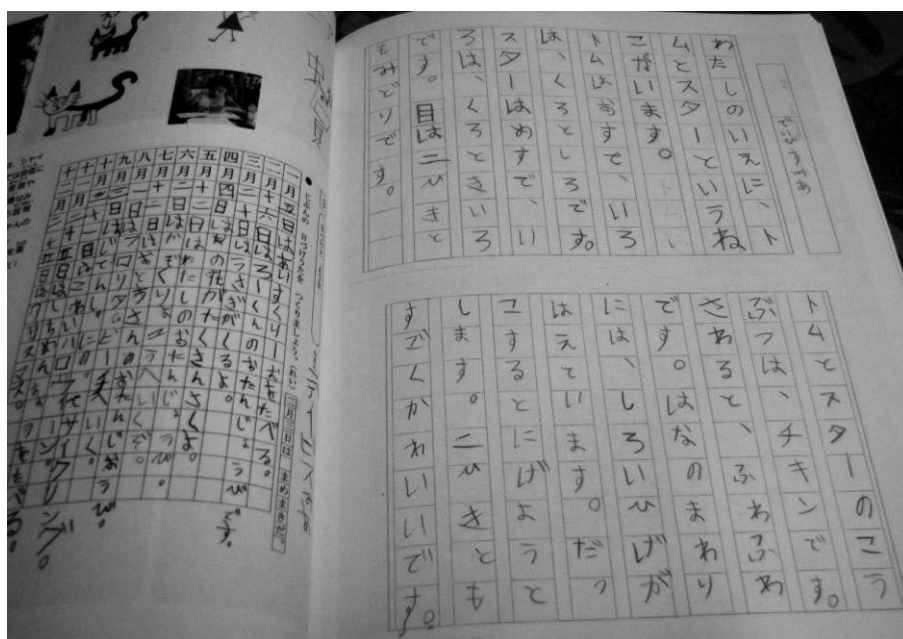


Figure 3. Excerpts from an assignment featured in the 2016-17 photo book.

Among the methods that she uses to teach Japanese at home, Shimamoto-sensei mentioned that whenever her children watch TV with her, it must be Japanese TV. At night, the bedtime stories that she reads are in Japanese as well. Additionally, she helps her children with their homework and prepares extra-assignments for them. Every month, she orders extra textbooks so that her children hear different stories and expand their vocabulary. Finally, she

¹⁵ Japanese syllabaries used for writing native Japanese words (*hiragana*) and foreign words (*katakana*).

mentioned that she loves Japanese songs and that whenever she is driving and her kids are in the car she plays Japanese music. Shimamoto-sensei started teaching at the JWSNO way before she had Alexander.

My friend, who used to be a teacher here, told me that they were looking for someone and that I should apply. I have a Japanese teaching license and I enjoy teaching very much. When I got pregnant the first time, I stopped because I wanted to focus on my family and my other career. Sometime later, I started teaching again. It's a lot of commitment, but I love it.

As I mentioned before, the books used at the JWSNO are prescribed by the MEXT. However, Shimamoto-sensei usually takes some of her personal books to class. When asked if she used similar methods at home and in the classroom, Shimamoto-sensei mentioned that sometimes if she wants to help her students understand a difficult concept, she will show them pictures and videos in her iPad. "I do this at home as well with my children," she explained. "I think that nowadays it's very important to teach with a blend of tradition and technology."

Japanese language education at the JWSNO is characterized by lessons that incorporate socio-cultural aspects of Japanese society and culturally appropriate behaviors in a variety of ways. In this section, I provide some ethnographic examples that show how cultural politics are an essential part of the learning environment at this school.

The Military

In one of his classes, Himura-sensei¹⁶ devoted approximately an hour to a discussion of the United Nations and the history of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (SDF). He talked about Japan's shift from having a military that can only act in self-defense to one that aids the UN in peacekeeping missions. The children asked questions such as: What is the difference between the U.S. military and the SDF? What does the Japanese constitution say about the SDF? Himura-sensei explained how World War II devastated the Japanese and how, consequently, Japan renounced the right of belligerency. The children were astonished, and they continued to ask questions about the SDF. Before class was over, Himura-sensei addressed the whole class and said: "It is important to understand our history and what we have decided to become." Beyond explaining how and why Japanese people wear pacifism as a badge of honor, Himura-sensei explored Japanese ideas on nationalism and its evolution in this society. In doing so, he explained an important aspect of Japanese culture and identity.

Eating in the street?

On September 30th, 2017, the children in Maruyama-sensei's class invited me to be their guest speaker in a short presentation. After it was over, some of the children approached me and asked me what the best part of living in America was. Instead of talking about education and

¹⁶ During my fieldwork, Himura-sensei was the 5th grade teacher.

career opportunities, I told them that the thing I loved the most was being able to eat while walking or whenever I took the bus. As expected, the children looked at me and started laughing. One of them said: “But you can do that anywhere in the world! Why is it so special?” I explained to the children that while I was living in Japan, I learned that it is considered extremely rude to eat while walking or riding the bus/train. The children did not believe me and so, I encouraged them to ask their mothers about it. One of these women was, in fact, listening to our conversation. She approached our circle and told the children that politeness, jap. *Teinei*, and annoyance, jap. *Meiwaku*, are very important aspects of Japanese etiquette and that they would be expected to respect those rules if they ever visit Japan.

Classroom Instructions and Etiquette

When starting class in a Japanese classroom, all the way to high school, students are expected to stand up and bow to show respect to their *sensei*. When the bell rings, or in the case of the JWSNO when the clock strikes 9:00 am, a student in each classroom will lead the process with the following instructions:

1. *Kiritsu* (stand up)
2. *Ki o tsuke* (attention)
3. *Rei* (bow)
4. *Chakuseki* (sit down)

The *sensei* will usually bow as well and then begin class. When class is over, the process repeats. Although we are in the United States, all the appropriate customs that apply to Japanese settings are present in the JWSNO as well. Apologizing is also an essential component of Japanese etiquette. Not being on time for class is an example of this. There are several phrases that students, myself included, had to use if we arrived after class has already started. These included

sumimasen, ozokunarimashita (I am sorry for being late) and *o-matase shimashita* (I am sorry to have kept you waiting). Children raised in this educational environment also learn that it is quite important to explicitly say you understand a concept. In all the classes I observed, teachers would constantly repeat the phrase *wakarimashita ka?* (Do you understand?) and children would always reply by saying *hai, wakarimashita* (Yes, I understood) or *iie, wakarimasen* (no, I don't understand). Furthermore, it is also common for children to let their *sensei* know every time they finish an assignment and they will do so by saying *owari desu* or *owatta* (I am done).

Conclusion

For the seven participants of this study, being Japanese in America is characterized by a collectively shared idea of cultural attachment to a distant nation. This awareness of being affiliated to a confined space that quasi-replicates Japanese society, then, has fueled these seven individuals' desire to connect themselves to people that share that same sense of ethnic belonging. As Anderson suggests, there are many aspects to take into consideration when we discuss the intersection of identity and nationhood. Japan's history of imperialism, colonization, and expansionism attests to this. Social circumstances have shaped Japanese people's perceptions of themselves and what it means to be Japanese in contemporary times. The diasporic consciousness that unites these parents, then, is shaped by their ability to discern which aspects of Japanese society connect them to one another in profoundly self-conscious ways.

The *Shin-issei* featured in this paper hold on to cultural traditions and the belief that their children will learn culturally appropriate behaviors through language instruction and the socialization experiences that take place at the school. Furthermore, by teaching Japanese at home and at the JWSNO the participants of this study have created narratives of diasporic identity with the purpose of strengthening their attachment to their homeland. Coupled with this idea of diasporic nationalism, we also encounter that teaching Japanese to their children and to other kids at the JWSNO symbolizes a way for these parents to reconnect with their cultural heritage. As the *Issei* did with the *Nisei* decades ago, *Shin-issei* living in New Orleans strive to motivate their children to learn Japanese and most importantly, to *feel* Japanese. These parents believe that keeping their culture and language alive will reinforce their children's sense of identity and will help them learn how they are supposed to conduct themselves in a Japanese environment.

For all the parents featured in this project, learning Japanese is a valuable experience that connects children to their grandparents and other members of their extended families and provides them with the opportunity to grow up as bilingual and in cases, multilingual individuals that will have better opportunities for succeeding in their professional lives. Additionally, this study has shown that the “it feels natural to teach Japanese” pattern is related to the parents’ eagerness to keep ties to Japan and the idea that ethnic identity can be molded through language instruction. One day, I was sitting in the school’s lounge waiting for the clock to strike 9:00 am. Suddenly, an older lady sat next to me. She asked me what I was doing at the school. As I explained my project as best as I could, her expression changed from a frown to a warm smile. It was time for me to attend a class session, but before I could leave my seat she said:

I think that we all want to be able to communicate with our children and grandchildren in our language. It’s a feeling that I cannot describe. Coming to America is not easy. For many of us, speaking Japanese is all we have; it’s how we connect to Japan. This school symbolizes so much for us and for our families. It’s like a home away from home.

The people in this community understand that language is more than a way to communicate with others. They see language as a cultural tool that carries their customs and traditions. The soul of this project resides in the idea that language resonates in the hearts of these people in one way or another. It allows them to connect to their country, their families, and memories that cannot be replaced. Members of the Japanese Weekend School of New Orleans have been crafting Japanese-ness as an ethnic, cultural, and social identity for more than three decades. Despite countless obstacles, these individuals have found a way to move forward and I am sure that no matter the difficulty, they will continue to do so.

References

- Anderson, Benedict. 1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso.
- Contino, Jennifer M. 2003. *The Japanese Americans*. Broomall, Pa.: Mason Crest.
- Dewey, Joseph. 2013. *Encyclopedia of American Immigration (Online Edition)*. Salem Press.
- Doerr, N. M. and Kiri Lee. 2009. Contesting Heritage: Language, Legitimacy, and Schooling at a Weekend Japanese-Language School in the United States. *Language and Education*, 23(5):425-41.
- Doerr, N. M. and Kiri Lee. 2010. Inheriting Japanese-ness Diversely. *Critical Asian Studies*, 42(5):91-216.
- Hosokawa, William K. 1969. *Nisei: The Quiet Americans*. New York: William Morrow and Company.
- Ichioka, Yuji. 1988. *The Issei: The World of the First Generation Japanese Immigrants, 1885-1924*. New York: The Free Press.
- Japan Society of New Orleans. www.japansocietyofneworleans.org.
- Kitagawa, Daisuke. 1967. *Issei and Nisei: The Internment Years*. New York: The Seabury Press.
- Kitano, Harry. 1969. *Japanese Americans: The Evolution of a Subculture*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

McQuaid, John. 2001. World traveler: Lafcadio Hearn's 19th century writings about the unique cultures of his two adopted hometowns -New Orleans and Matsue, Japan- resonate in both places to this day, so much so that Japanese tourists frequently visit New Orleans to trace Hearn's footsteps. *The Times-Picayune*. Newsbank.

Schiller, Nina. 2005. Encyclopedia of Diasporas: Immigrant and Refugee Cultures around the World. Vol 1: 70-80. New York: Kluber Academics/Plenum Publishers

Soong, Tina. 1990. Weekend School Bolsters Japanese Culture for Kids. *The Times-Picayune*, p. 2A1. Newsbank.

Soong, Tina. 2007. Japanese School Going Strong. *The Times-Picayune*, p. 06. Newsbank.

Westbrook, Laura. 2011. Japanese Culture and Dance in Southeast Louisiana. *Folklife in Louisiana*, www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/Japanese.html.

Wyatt, Barbara. 2012. Japanese Americans in World War II. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Interior.