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Narratives to identities: Japanese graduate teaching assistants as language teachers

Junyuan Chen
Central Washington University
Junyuan.Chen@cwu.edu

Abstract

The present study explores Japanese student teachers' identity construction and transition with focuses on contexts both inside and outside the classroom in the online environment during the COVID-19 pandemic. By integrating language teacher identities as a complex and dynamic entirety rather than detached pieces, this qualitative research study utilizes both narrative inquiry and positioning analysis to examine four Japanese student teacher identities through both discursive construction in discourse and momentary behavior in talk-in-interaction. The data collected from the surveys, class observations, interviews and weekly meetings revealed four aspects of Japanese student teacher identities: (1) beliefs on foreign language education in and beyond the classroom, (2) self-perceptions of not only language teachers but also future supporters and life helpers, (3) perceptions of teaching Japanese live-online during the COVID-19 pandemic and (4) beliefs on successful language teaching relying on bidirectional cooperation of both teachers and students. The article concludes with a discussion about how the possible directions for future research in terms of the contextual narrative exploration in languages other than English and the integration of both narrative inquiry and positioning analysis methods.

Keywords: Japanese, language teacher identity, belief, perception, narrative, positioning analysis

1 Introduction

Research on language teacher identity has increased massively especially in the last two decades (Kayi-Aydar, 2019a), as a result of the rapid development of identity research in classroom discourse. It is worthwhile to explore how language teachers perceive themselves, because their perceptions and beliefs about themselves strongly and ultimately influence their foreign/second language teaching. In addition to full-time teachers, graduate teaching assistants of foreign language programs also have many chances to teach in the classroom in large public universities in the Unites States. Therefore, finding out more about GTAs self-perceptions and their beliefs about what constitutes a good language teacher is of great importance in language teaching. For this research study, I examined language teachers' identities (LTIs) by gathering data about perceptions and beliefs of graduate teaching assistants (GTAs). Since GTAs occupy roles both as students and teachers in their programs, they are often addressed as "student teachers" in previous literatures. Thus, in this study, the terms "GTA" and "student teacher" are interchangeable.

Although often regarded as one of the less commonly taught languages in the U.S, Japanese has been one of the five most studied languages in the United States recently (Furman, Goldberg, & Lusin, 2010; Goldberg, Looney, & Lusin, 2015; Looney & Lusin, 2019). Given the large enrollment, it is important to further explore the identities of Japanese language teachers, who play an important role in students' Japanese learning journey. However, lamentedly, compared to the steadily development of Japanese programs, research on identities of Japanese language teachers in the U.S is a notable absence. Since English is a lingua franca nowadays, the identities of English foreign language teachers have received considerable research attention in various contexts. Particularly in Japan, English language teachers' identities have been profoundly and extensively researched through many case studies from the perspectives of institutional demands (Duff & Uchida, 1997), pedagogical innovation (Kiernan, 2010) and much broader sociopolitical contexts such as gender and age (Nagatomo, 2012). However, on the contrary, Japanese language teachers' identities in English-speaking countries are under-researched. Indeed, the identities of many languages other than English such as Spanish (e.g., Thompson & Fioramonte, 2012), Chinese (e.g., Diao & Liu, 2019) and Korean (e.g., Kim & Kim, 2016), have received attention recently. But for Japanese, there is only one notable case study conducted by Armour (2004), who examined narrative data collected from interviews with a nonnative Japanese speaker who "accidentally" became a Japanese teacher in Australia.

Therefore, the current study aims to respond the rising demand as well as to fill the research gap in the literature by examining Japanese student teachers' identities from the perspective of their teaching beliefs and perceptions. In addition, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many university-level Japanese language classes have been migrated to online since 2020. This study also aims to explore how the change of teaching venue impacts on Japanese language teachers' identities that has yet to be sufficiently explored.

2 Language teacher identities

From a poststructural perspective, identity is viewed as fluid, dynamic and constantly negotiated (e.g., Antaki, 1998; Bamberg, 2006; Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). Zimmermann (1998) also emphasizes the connection between identity and context by viewing identity as "an element of context for talk-in-interaction" (p. 87). In other words, identity is constantly shaped by different contexts and can be practiced and observed in interactions. Thus, LTIs are also continuously negotiated with contextual such as "classroom/institutional culture, instructional materials, and reactions from students and colleagues" (Duff & Uchida, 1997, p. 460).

2.1 Language teacher identities are performed rather than possessed

LTIs are performed by language teachers (Pennington & Richards, 2016; Watson, 2007), because language instructors agentively choose to present different aspects of who they are as language educators in various discursive encounters (Barkhuizen, 2016). Their performative displays are constantly dynamic and negotiated, revealing "possibilities rather than certainties" (Morgan, 2016, p. 206).

Barkhuizen (2016) suggests that language teacher identities (LTIs) are with the feature of "being and doing" (p. 4), because teachers perform being teachers. The performative displays of language teachers are always "dialogic and negotiated, suggesting possibilities rather than certainties" (Morgan, 2016, p. 206), since language teachers agentively choose to present different identities in different situations or contexts (Barkhuizen, 2016). Mok (1994) also found that teachers' self-concept, principles, and their own cognition of the teacher-student relationship influence their decisions about teaching, and "their beliefs and theories of and about teaching are guided by their previous experience and identities as a learner and as a teacher" (p. 109). In a summary, how teachers perform being teachers at a given moment is affected and determined their assumptions and beliefs about what teachers should be. In addition, their viewpoints, assumptions and beliefs constantly shape and are being shaped by their choices.

2.2 Language teacher identities are historical, contemporary and future-oriented

Block (2016) regards LTIs as bringing "together experiences in the past and present, as well as those anticipated in the future" (p. 34), which illustrates that LTIs are historical, contemporary and future-oriented. Many scholars also examined LTIs in related norms such as past experiences and backgrounds (Trent, 2013; Kayi-Aydar, 2019c), momentary feelings and emotions (Barcelo, 2016; Benesch, 2018; Yazan & Peercy, 2016) and imagined experiences of possible future selves (Gaines *et. al*, 2018; Kubanyiova, 2016). Particularly, Farrell (2016) emphasized the significance of self-perception, because as a language educator, "who I am is how I teach" (p. 183). The "who" as in "who I am is how I teach" is an essential factor of a teacher's self-perception "at the tacit level of awareness" (Farrell, 2016, p. 184). To unravel this tacit understanding, a teacher's reflective practice of both current position ("where I am now") and previous experiences ("where I have come from"), as a substantial component of LTIs, plays an important role (Farrell, 2016). In addition, Oda (2016) suggests that LTIs are teachers' perceptions of what resources they have "accumulated through past experiences inside and outside the classroom in order to respond by taking action in teaching at the present time and in the future" (p. 225). Thus, to summarize, LTIs are determined by what language teachers experienced previously, influenced by teachers' feelings about local contexts of "what is going on" currently, and guided by teachers' beliefs about "who I want to be" in the future.

In addition, LTIs are related to both inside teachers' inner thoughts and feelings, as well as the surrounding world. Moreover, the negotiation between individual and social/cultural dimensions constantly happens (Duff & Uchida, 1997; Tsui, 2007; Xu, 2016). Therefore, given the continuous negotiation process, LTIs are widely viewed as dynamic, relational, multiple and constructed (Hadfield, 2016; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Mercer, 2017).

2.3 Language teacher identities and narratives

Lastly, LTIs are being able to be examined through narratives, because language teachers can make sense of, and reshape their experiences by telling stories (Barkhuizen, 2016; Yazan, 2019). The understanding that LTIs "not only orients but also emerges from teachers' experiences" (Yazan, 2019, p. 3) makes narrative approaches reasonable to investigate LTIs through stories. Aiming to underscore the significance of narrative research for understanding LTIs, Hayes (2016) presented his narrative data collected in Sri Lanka and Thailand. Hayes (2016) suggested that LTIs should not be "solely bound up with expertise in the language and proficiency in teaching

methods" (p. 56), since teachers have their own concerns and preoccupations (e.g., economic necessity and emotional deprivation on local children) through the narration of teachers in Sri Lanka and Thailand. He found out that "teachers exercise their own agency, have their own strongly held views of themselves as teachers, and are not merely passive instruments of larger geopolitical forces, unknowingly colluding in the linguistic-imperialist enterprise of English language teaching" (Hayes, 2016, p. 57).

2.4 Language teacher identities in the study

Although it is widely accepted that LTIs can be analyzed in "identity-in-discourse" and "identity-in-practice" (Varghese, et. al, 2005), it is still unclear how the line should be drawn, since language use could also be regarded as an action, especially in the "contexts in which narratives take place" (Bamberg, 2006, p. 139). In this sense, language teachers' language use and narratives can be viewed as practices instead of merely within the notion of discourse. Therefore, teachers' conversational interactions in professional settings (conferences, instructors' weekly meetings, etc.) could be reasonably regarded as practices. Thus, in light of the complexities of LTIs, I view LTIs as a dynamic, fluid and negotiated entity that can be narrated and discursively constructed through historical, contemporary and future-oriented perspectives within changing contexts.

Thus, built upon the research gap, previous literatures, the research purpose, as well as the unavoidable global crisis, the present study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are Japanese student teachers' beliefs of good language teaching?
2. What perceptions Japanese student teachers have for teaching Japanese live-online?
3. How does live-online teaching during COVID-19 pandemic interrelate with the Japanese student teachers' identities?

3 Methods

3.1 Participants

The participants in this study were all teaching Japanese in the same Japanese language program at a big public university located in the southern U.S. during the time of data collection. There are four graduate student teachers — Yoko, Maki, Misa, Rena, and two full-time instructors — Hana, Aki (all pseudo names). All six participants are female Japanese native language speakers. The detailed information is listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Information of participants

Name	Working type	Age	Teaching level	Teaching Experiences	Languages spoken	Time joined
Hana	Full-time, lead	50-59	Beginning	18 years	Japanese, English	2002
Asa	Full-time, lead	30-39	Intermediate	5.5 years	Japanese, English	2014
Misa	Student, lead	30-39	Intermediate	5 years	Japanese, English	2016
Yoko	Student	30-39	Intermediate	8 years	Japanese, English, Mandarin	2016
Maki	Student	30-39	Beginning & Intermediate	6 years	Japanese, English	2015
Rena	Student	20-29	Beginning	3 years	Japanese, English	2020

During the time when the research was being conducted, the research participants were separated into three groups. The graduate student, Maki, was teaching two different levels at the same time.
Group A: Hana leading Maki and Rena at the beginning level.
Group B: Asa leading Maki at the intermediate level.
Group C: Misa leading Yoko at the intermediate level.

Misa

Misa has taught Japanese for 5 years and regards herself as a novice teacher. This semester, Misa was the only student working as a lead instructor with Yoko to teach an intermediate Japanese class. She entered the program (as an M. A. student) in the same year as Yoko (as a doctoral student) in 2016. This was her first time being a lead

instructor, and she attended Japanese lead teachers' weekly meetings as the only student teacher.

Yoko

Yoko has the most teaching experience of the four student teachers. She has taught Japanese for around 8 years in various environments ranging from teaching children in pre care to teaching adult workers in hotels. However, despite long and rich teaching experiences, she still does not regard herself as an experienced teacher, but at the middle stage of becoming one.

Maki

Maki worked with both lead instructors since she taught two levels at the same time. She entered the Japanese program in 2015. Since she taught two classes simultaneously, she had to attend two weekly meetings with both two full-time lead instructors, Hana and Asa.

Rena

Rena was very new to the Japanese program. She joined this program less than two months prior to the time when this research project began. She taught a beginning level class with both Hana and Maki.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

I collected data by first distributing questionnaires regarding participants' personal information and Japanese teaching experiences, including as full-time instructors. After obtaining their completed questionnaires, I started to observe lessons taught by each participant (except for Rena due to some personal reasons) once a week from September to December. I also videotaped their online weekly meetings through Zoom among GTAs and lead instructors. Then, starting in October, I arranged a 45-minute interview containing 12 semi-structured questions with each participant to inquire about their beliefs and perceptions of being a language teacher, how online language teaching interrelated with their identities and some specific questions regarding some phenomena I observed in class.

To analyze the data by integrating LTIs as an entirety rather than separated pieces, I first read all the collected data from class observations, interviews and weekly meetings. Then I analyzed Japanese student teacher LTIs in two different contexts. One is inside-classroom teaching, which I observed through narrative inquiry and class observations, while the other is outside-classroom interactions, including student teachers' talk-in-interactions with their coworkers through positioning analysis.

Through narrative approach, stories reflect contexts at three different levels — story (all in small letters), Story (with a capital S) and STORY (all in capital letters) level (Barkhuizen 2008, Barkhuizen, 2015). Barkhuizen (2008) suggests that these three levels are interconnected, and "the stories mutually construct each other" (p. 234). The story level, as a micro level in the innermost circle, embodies language teachers' "inner thoughts, emotions, ideas and theories" (p. 235), as well as social interactions during their teaching practice. The Story level, as a meso level which is wider than the interactional context, includes stories that are consequences of others' decisions such as the policy of the language program (Barkhuizen 2008, Barkhuizen, 2015). The macro level of STORY consists of even broader contexts in which teachers have the least power, such as decisions made by the U.S. Department of Education, or unavoidable public social issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic in this study.

4 Findings

4.1 Foreign language education in and beyond classroom at story level

The story level in the most inner circle reflects language teachers' thoughts, feelings, ideas and theories (Barkhuizen 2008, Barkhuizen, 2015). In this study, all four student teachers mentioned how important it is to incorporate "authentic/real context/situation/conversation" into language teaching in their narrations. Actually, "real" is the word that appeared most frequently throughout their interview narrations. These narrations reflected their beliefs about "authentic" and "context-based communication" on Japanese teaching.

Misa Although I teach what's written in the textbook, I still take the perspective of **communication** primarily. For example, in **real conversation**, you can do this or that (which is not in the textbook).

Yoko I tend to create some **situations** that are used in **reality**.

Maki It's good to (teach Japanese that) could be used in **real life**.

Rena I think good Japanese teaching contains materials using **real conversations** and **real occasions**.

Additionally, all student teachers emphasized the significance of language teachers' impact for students beyond the classroom. Misa and Yoko narrated that good teaching should be helpful for students' future development. As for beliefs of a good teacher, Maki focused on expanding student's interests, while Rena expressed that a good teacher should care about students' emotions and their daily lives outside classes.

Misa I think it's good to **build a base that (helps them) continue (studying Japanese) in the future.**

Yoko I think (it's good) to help students **utilize Japanese by themselves in the future.**

Maki What I can teach is just a little. So, I think it's good for students **to expand their interests instead of being limited in textbooks.**

Rena I think it's good to follow (take care) students' emotions and **their lives outside the class**, and to pay attention to details (of students).

4.2 Perceptions of teachers as supporters/ helpers at Story level

The second level of Story (with a capital S) is wider than the immediate context, including "consequences of decisions typically made by others in the work environment (Barkhuizen, 2008, 235). These decisions contain decision-makers' attitudes and expectations, as well as the required methods and materials (Barkhuizen 2008, Barkhuizen, 2015) for language teaching. At the Story level, teachers themselves have less power to challenge or manipulate. Moreover, their practices are heavily affected by others' decisions. Misa, as the only student lead teacher who attended meetings with the director of Japanese program, reflected directly through her narrations:

Misa The fundamental thing is to accept what the director said, then accomplish it well. For example, you cannot do things very creative or make big changes.

In this study, the Japanese language program adopted immersion learning, thus teachers were expected to use Japanese as much as possible. However, when explaining some key structures, especially to the beginning level students whose Japanese language proficiency is not high enough, the teachers still needed to use some English briefly. On most occasions during the class, teachers started with *sumimasen, chotto e:go de i:masu* (sorry, but I'm going to speak English a little). It reflects student teachers' acceptances of the immersion teaching implemented by the program, which treats English as an interruption of the students' immersion experience.

Additionally, the program named teacher-student meeting time "help hours" instead of "office hours." This name change resulted in creating a more friendly environment for students to talk with teachers without psychological burdens, as many participants mentioned that students often came to talk about problems not only with the Japanese language but also with what was happening in their lives. Misa referred to it as *nayami so:dan* (trouble consultation) in her narration. This concept of "help" influenced student teachers deeply; all the student teachers expressed the belief that good language teachers should also be supporters/helpers for students during the narrative inquiry.

Misa I think it's best if I can **support** students (and let them know that) "I'm paying attention to you", or "you are not alone".

Yoko I think **I want to help** students utilize Japanese by themselves in the future.

Maki Instead of imposing my ideas, I think it's good if **I could help students (to speak)** what they want to say and what they are interested in (in Japanese).

Rena It's good if I could become **a teacher like a trusted supporter** (for students).

4.3 Perceptions of live-online Japanese language teaching during COVID-19 at STORY level

The level of STORY, as Barkhuizen (2008) suggests, refers to even broader sociopolitical contexts in which teachers have the least power to make decisions. This level includes "national language-in-education policy, imposed curriculum from Ministries of Education, and socioeconomic circumstances in a region" (Barkhuizen, 2008, 235). In this study, the global risk of COVID-19 is undoubtedly considered to be at the STORY level, given that it is a prevalent social problem across the whole world. Due to the high public health risk, almost all universities across the United States have migrated their courses to online/live-online gradually in 2020, and the Japanese program in this study is of course, not an exception.

When asked how GTAs think about teaching Japanese live-online, all of them immediately responded "It's tough/difficult". They specifically stressed how difficult it is to monitor students' knowledge assessment through Zoom if students have their cameras turned off and they are not able to see them directly.

Misa **I can't see students entirely**. In the classroom, I immediately know that this student didn't understand on their faces. So this is most difficult for me.

Yoko Only a few students turn on their cameras, so it's tough for me for **not knowing how students are doing.**

Maki If it's in the classroom, I could see all students' states. Now many students don't turn on their cameras and I cannot see them. **So I don't really know how they are doing.** I like physical classroom better, but I can do nothing with it because of the corona virus.

Rena **It's difficult to see how students are doing**, so I can't read the air (means understand the atmosphere or what's going on).

Although student teachers share the perspective that there are tough issues, they still perceive online teaching through various positive perspectives. One common advantage mentioned by Misa and Maki is that online teaching may benefit those students who are not very good at personal social interaction.

Misa In the class, sometimes we have students that struggle in commutation with others, right? For those kids who can't directly talk with people, they are somehow able to talk online.

Maki For those who have social anxiety and feel difficult to interact with others, they don't have problems online anymore. For them. Online teaching might be a better way (to learn Japanese).

Yoko also thought that online teaching gave students more time for practicing typing in Japanese, which was less practiced in the in-person classroom. Rena, from the standpoint of teaching development for herself, expressed the view that online teaching allowed her to have more time to prepare before real class.

Yoko Since it's online, (students get to) practice typing better.

Rena I don't commute to school, so I take the time to revise my teaching plan and practice until real class. I have more time to prepare. I think that's the good side of Zoom (teaching).

However, all four student teachers admitted that working from home caused some identity struggles in terms of work-life balance. They took a lot of steps to control and minimize this conflict. Since none of the student teachers have a specific study room for working, they tried hard to keep a space that is convenient for teaching and doesn't distract students, so as to maintain their professional identity. Furthermore, student teachers explored various methods to switch their professional identity on, even though they had to stay at home, which is a place they view as a relaxing harbor. One of the most interesting strategies adopted by most of the GTAs was dressing differently when assuming their professional identity and when they are not in that role.

Misa I only make up on class days. When I don't have class, I dress more casually, but on class days, I wear official cloth from that morning... Then I moved place since September. I've done work in the bedroom so far. But it is dark there and has no lights. When I teach, I'm in the position of speaking where it's seen by students. I think it's better to have bright place, so I moved. I came to the dining table in the kitchen with lights.

Yoko I cleaned my desk for study and work. When I sit in front of the desk, I only do my job and study while all the other part of my life is somewhere else. (I live in) a studio. If there are separate rooms, I think it's easy to switch (my identity).

Maki In my room, the AC and heater are very noisy, so when I have class, I switched them off. And then for the days I teach I dress differently. For the other days I wear sweat.

Rena I borrowed headphone and microphone from the library. Then I maintain a space in my room (for teaching). I found a place without anything in the background. It is important to have a place bright and quiet... Also, as for the cloth, I changed when I teach compared to when I am a student. For example, I wear shirts with collars when I teach. By doing so I think I could switch to the identity of a teacher.

4.4 Bidirectional cooperation rather than unidirectional practice

Throughout conversations and narratives during weekly meetings of the three groups, I employ positioning analysis to examine how GTA's LTIs are reflected through moment-by-moment conversation exchanges. As Kayi-Aydar (2019b) points out, since positioning theory concentrates on momentary actions in a moral landscape, "it takes in beliefs and practices as well as historical and social dimensions" (p. 1). Thus, in this section, I examine how GTAs position themselves with their students through the usage of benefactive verbs in talk-in-interaction with their colleagues.

In Japanese, there are basically three types of giving and receiving verbs (*ageru* and *kureru* for "giving" and *morau* for "receiving"). These three types of giving and receiving verbs have been researched extensively for almost half a century (e.g., Kuno 1973; Ide, 2018), representing "two human entities with one performing an act for someone's benefit and the [other] one who receives the benefit" (Ide, 2020, p. 62). Furthermore, these giving and receiving verbs constitute benefactives when they are combined with main verbs. For example, the derivations of three benefactives of the verb *ganbaru* (to do one's best) are *ganbat-te-ageru*, *ganbat-te-kureru*, and *ganbat-te-morau* respectively. In other words, beyond the literal meanings of the actual giving and receiving actions, these verbs represent the interlocutor's stance regarding who gives the benefit and who receives the benefit, and thus how they position themselves in the narratives. Through investigating how GTAs position themselves with students during weekly meetings, we are able to examine their various perspectives regarding beliefs about "good language teaching".

In excerpt 1, the lead instructor, Hana, was having a discussion with Maki about her class that observed by the program director, teacher M. When Maki was praised by the lead instructor Hana for having a good class, she utilized the benefactive verb *-te morau* to position herself as a benefit receiver from students as demonstrated below.

Excerpt 1

Maki "ganbatte moratte", Group A Meeting on 11/18/2020 (38:23-38:53)

1. Hana: nde, Maki-san wa M-sense: no are wa
   And then, Maki-san, M teacher's that
2. Hana: umaku itta mitai desu ((nodding)) ne.
   looks like the class went well, ((nodding)) right?
3. Hana: ano:: [jyugyo: kengaku wa.
   That… [class observation.
4. Maki: [((shaking head)) i:e.
   [((shaking head)) no
5. Maki: ((smiling)) umaku itte wa nai [desu kedo.
   It didn't go well though.
6. Hana: [ha ha ha
   [hahaha
7. Hana: demo ano:: gakuse: ga nanka,
   But that… students
8. Hana: umaku hanno: shita mitai de.
   Looks students had good reflection.
9. Maki: nantoka mo: F-san to N-san=
   Somehow (I did it). It was really F-san and N-san
10. Maki: =Kino: Y-san ga yasumi datta node,
    Yesterday, Y-san was absent, so
11. Maki: mo: T-san toka, F-san, N-san ni,
    Really, it was T-san, F-san, N-san
12. → Maki: [tada e:to ganbatte [@moratte@ ha ha ha
    I only um received their benefit for trying their best. Hahaha.
13. Hana: [((laughing))

Hana received the feedback written by the program director and knew that it was a successful class. So, she complimented Maki by saying "looks like the class went well" (*umaku itta mitai*) in line 2. However, Maki rejected it directly with "no" (*i:e*), then explaining "it didn't go well though" (*umaku itte wa ai desu kedo*).

The benefactive *-te morau* reflects the speaker, who is also the receiver of the benefit in the focus rather than the giver (Maynard, 2009). Therefore, when Maki received complement from the lead instructor in line 2 (the class went well), she did not accept it but positioned herself as a beneficiary of students because "they tried their best for me" (*ganbatte moratte*). Similarly, Misa and Yoko also utilized the benefactive form of *-te morau* to express how students cooperated with them as in excerpt 2 and 3.

Excerpt 2

Yoko "ganbatte morattara", Group C Meeting on 10/28/2020 (23:22-23:38)

1. Yoko: ha::: ganbaro:
   A, I'm gonna try my best.
2. Yoko: chotto kyo: kara chotto jyunbishite [oko: haha
   I'm going to prepare a little since today haha.
3. Misa: [iya::
   No…
4. Misa: nanka mo yappa jyunbishita tsumori demo,
   I thought I prepared but still
5. Misa: are desu ne ((nodding)) [honto: ni umaku [ikanai mon desu ne.
   That, you know. It's the thing that really doesn't go well
6. Yoko: [((nodding)) [u::n ((nodding))
   Un-hum
7. → Yoko: chotto gakuse: mo ganbatte morattara [i: na:
   It will be good if (I could receive students' benefits that) they could also try their best
8. Misa: [hahaha @tashikani@
   Hahaha, that's the thing

In excerpt 2, Yoko and Misa were also talking about teacher M's observation. Misa's class had been observed already, while Yoko's class observation was scheduled for the following week. Before the weekly meeting, Misa received the feedback from teacher M reminding her of some details she needed to pay attention to. She also described how nervous she was and mentioned that she did not think it was a successful class. Yoko sighed (line 1) and determined that she would start to prepare for the class (line 2). However, Misa felt that even though she prepared a lot, things still didn't go well (line 4 and 5). Yoko aligned with Misa's thoughts with both a non-verbal expression (nodding) and a verbal expression "un-hum" (u::n) in line 6. Then in line 7, Yoko expressed her wish for a good class — It would be good if (I could receive students' benefits that) they could also try their best (*chotto gakusee mo ganbatte morattara i: na:*).

Yoko's utterance in line 7 actually reflected her belief of a successful class from two aspects. Firstly, as the foregoing demonstrated, she utilized the conditional form *tara* of the benefactive *-te morau* to indicate that she would benefit from the students if they could try their best in her class. Additionally, she used "also" (*mo*) illustrating that a successful class required both effective teaching practices and students' cooperation. The word *ganbaru* (try one's best) appeared twice in its variations. In line 1, Yoko used the volitional form (*ganbaro:*) to express her own determination to try her best. Then in line 7, she proposed her hope that if students "also" (*mo*) try to do their best (*ganbatte morattara*) during the class, she would benefit from it. Thus a successful class needed *ganbaru* from both the teacher side and the student side. Therefore, from this excerpt, we can see Yoko's opinion that a good language class needed collaboration between both teachers and students.

Excerpt 3

Misa "dashite moratta", Group C Meeting on 10/28/2020 (01:38-01:50)

1. Misa: ma D-san wa tesuto shita node,
   Well, since D-san has already done the test
2. Misa: [dekita to omou node,
   I think he has finished, so…
3. Yoko: [a::
   Yeah
4. Yoko: yokatta [desu.
   That's good
5. → Misa: [de:: sakubun mo dashite moratta [node,
   Then, (I received the benefit that) he also submitted the essay, so
6. Yoko: [a::
   Yeah
7. Misa: daijyo:bu desu.
   It's fine.

In excerpt 3, Misa and Yoko were talking about D-san who was absent for the chapter test. Before the meeting, D-san came to Misa's help hour and finished the test. Then Misa tried to sync this information with Yoko during the weekly meeting. In line 5, Misa mentioned that the student submitted the essay by using the benefactive form (*dashite moratta*). Having tests is one of the most normal and frequent activities in the classroom, and thus part of classroom practices. Generally, taking exams in a timely manner is seen as a student's duties. However, Misa utilized the benefactive verb to show that she positioned herself as a benefit receiver from D-san's action of completing the test. This utterance reflects Misa's strong recognition that classroom practices are not comprised of unidirectional actions by teachers but a cooperative effort by both teachers and students.

Apart from utilizing benefactive verbs, Rena also reflected her perception of "student cooperation" through *okagede* (thanks to students) in excerpt 4. Excerpt 4 follows excerpt 1 immediately. When the lead instructor finished her discussion with Maki, she turned to Rena to ask about her class observation.

Excerpt 4

Rena "gakuse: no okagede", Group A Meeting on 11/18/2020 (39:13-39:27)

1. Hana: Rena-san ashitada kke
   Rena-san, you are tomorrow, right?
2. Rena: ((shaking head)) iya mo: owarimashita
   No, I've already finished.
3. Hana: mo: @owatta dakke no@ ((laughing silently))
   Already finished?

4. Rena: tesuto mae no [kinyo:bi ni=
On the Friday before the test
5. Hana: =tesuto mae no kinyo:bi dattanda kke
Was it on the Friday before the test (did you say)?
6. Hana: a: [so:da soda
Oh, right, right.
7. Rena: [hai
Yes.
8. Hana: de chu:yishita koto ga naosetete
Well, you corrected the things needed to pay attention t
9. Hana: yokatta ne mitaina koto wo ((nodding)) kaitanda kke
(Teacher M) wrote things like "it's good", right?
10. Rena: ((nodding)) @so: desu@ [hai
That's it. Yes.
11. Hana: [so:da yo ne
That's it, right?
12. → Rena: gakuse: no okage de
Thanks to students.

From line 1 to 7, the lead instructor, Hana, was confirming details of when Rena's class was observed because she could not remember it clearly. After she recalled teacher M's feedback, she made a compliment to Rena by paraphrasing teacher M's feedback (line 8) and commenting "it's good" (*yokatta ne*) in line 9. At first, Rena accepted this compliment in line 10, with both non-verbal (nodding) and verbal behavior: "That's it. Yes" (*so: desu. hai*). Then Hana aligned with Rena's acceptance by uttering "That's it, right?" (*so: da yo ne*). Soon after, in line 12, Rena downgraded this compliment to some extent and acknowledged students' contribution to the class — "Thanks to students" (*gakuse: no okage de*). From Rena's utterance, it is clear that she positioned herself as benefiting from students' behavior. Unlike Maki, who denied the compliment and completely attributed a good class to her students, Rena first accepted the praise. However, she immediately qualified her statement by making a supplement explanation of how grateful she was for students' participation. Therefore, this excerpt reflects Rena's belief that students' cooperation in the classroom is an essential and indispensable element of a good language classroom, just as the other three student teachers.

To summarize, in this section, all four student teachers expressed their understanding of the importance of students' participation during language teaching. They utilize specific words such as Japanese benefactive verbs to indicate their stance towards students. Their interactions reflected their beliefs that effective and successful language teaching requires bidirectional cooperation between teachers and students rather than constituting unidirectional practices merely from the teacher's side.

5 Discussion

As a response to the increasing demand for Japanese teachers, this study contributes to understanding of an under-researched topic, Japanese language teacher identities, by focusing on a group of four Japanese student teachers. By integrating language teacher identities as an undivided notion, this study utilized both narrative inquiry and positioning analysis to examine participants' LTIs through contexts both inside and outside the classroom. The findings support Barkhuizen's (2008) theories, as all four GTAs' stories reflected at three levels — teaching beliefs at the story level, self-recognitions at the Story level and perceptions of teaching Japanese live-online at the STORY level.

In addition, as Georgakopoulou (2007) points out, representations of "others" are actually "constructions of social and moral orders and realities" (p.120). In other words, when commenting on or telling stories about others or (absent) third parties, the story tellers are still constantly constructing their identities through positioning themselves. In this study, through analyzing student teachers' utilization of Japanese benefactive verbs (*-te morau*) when they talk about students' behavior, the research has illustrated that they reflected their beliefs and perceptions that good classes and good language teaching consist of bidirectional collaboration by teachers and students, rather than merely teacher's lectures.

As for the implications, the findings suggest that contextual exploration through narratives would be equally constructive for research on foreign language teachers other than English. Barkhuizen (2008) conducted narrative research and presented his theoretical perspective completely in an English context. However, this study exemplifies those analyses of narratives in terms of contexts could also be employed in other language contexts such as Japanese. Additionally, this study provides an experimental attempt at combining narrative inquiry and

positioning analysis across two different contexts. By doing so, this study offers a comprehensive and thoroughgoing perspective on language teacher identities as "being and doing, feeling and imagining, and storying" (Barkhuizen, 2016, 4) through both narrative discourse and interactional practices.

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Appendix: Transcription Conventions

.	Falling sentence-final intonation.
:::	Colons indicate that the speaker has stretched the preceding sound. The more colons the greater the extent of stretching.
@--@	Utterance between the @ @ is said in a laughing voice.
ha ha ha	Laughter.
(0.5)	Length of pause/silence in seconds, (0.5) indicates a pause of 5-tenths of a second, relative to the speed of the preceding utterance.
(.)	Micro-pause.
[	A left-hand bracket marks the place an utterance starts to overlap with the following utterance.
=	Latched utterances
(( ))	Non-verbal behavior.