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How emotions and ideologies of public/private affect the research process

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Abstract

In diesem Beitrag reflektiere ich über die Zusammenhänge von Mobilität, Emotionen, Ideen und Wahrnehmungen im Kontext der öffentlich/privat-Distinktion während meines Feldforschungsaufenthalts in Japan. Dabei präsentiere ich meine Aufzeichnungen in einem Forschungstagebuch als eine reflexive Methode, durch die ich meine eigene Position und die damit verbundenen Annahmen über soziale Beziehungen im Feld kritisch hinterfragen konnte. Während meiner konzeptionellen Auseinandersetzung mit dem Tagebuch wurde mir die Notwendigkeit bewusst, mich stärker auf subjektive Perspektiven in meiner Forschung zu fokussieren. Dies führte dazu, dass ich im Verlauf meines Aufenthalts meine Forschungsmethoden anpassen konnte.

Schlagwörter: Reflexive mobility, emotion, ideology, diary, Japan, fieldwork, public/private

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1 Introduction

In April 2022, I embarked on a one-year fieldwork trip to Tokyo, Japan, to study metapragmatic activity and perceptions of communicative competence in interactions as part of my doctoral research project. My focus was on interactions of L1 and L2 users of Japanese. It was yet another relocation to Japan for study and research purposes, this time specifically with the aim of collecting audio recordings and conducting interviews. The last years have been characterized by a back-and-forth between Germany, Japan, and Austria. While I appreciate the opportunities presented by transnational mobility, I would now like to use this space offered to me to reflect on the significance of mobility in the context of my fieldwork experience. I will give an insight into my reflections post fieldwork in this contribution. The ideas presented here, however, are not an exhaustive review or discussion of the existing literature on fieldwork and its methods per se, but rather a reflection about the research process and how this experience has shaped my choice of methods. I will present a retrospective account of my fieldwork that I enrich with some theoretical concepts and ethical considerations. I will trace back how my position and my emotions have influenced my being in the field, what kind of changes I made based on these reflections during my fieldwork, and how ethnographic and phenomenologically-inspired approaches serve as lenses through which I observe my work.

Originally, I did not design my doctoral research project as an ethnography in the strict sense. My aim was to explore language ideologies in interactions of L1 and L2 users of Japanese who are residing in Japan, by looking at how metapragmatic stances toward competence (i.e., discursive positionings vis-à-vis potential and limitation of language use) emerge in interactional discourse. I did not clearly delineate a field for this project, as it is done in some ethnographies, such as an institution or bounded field site. Instead, I approached various actors via my academic and social network that I established over the past years in several cities in Japan. The original plan was to collect many hours of conversational data and then to

conduct different types of interviews with the participants (mostly with L2 users). These would include, for example, playback interviews in which I would ask about interpretations of communicative practices in the recordings and their experiences of learning and using Japanese. While being in the field, I set foot on pathways that slightly diverged from my initial plan, and I will trace my path in this contribution.

I will start with introducing events preceding fieldwork and a vignette from my fieldwork diary (Section 2). In this diary, I noted down theoretical thoughts, emotions, and experiences while living in Japan. This serves as an introduction to explore conceptual approaches toward understanding the fieldwork experience, starting out with the notion of *reflexive mobility* (Sections 3 & 4). I will then show how the mobile experience is entwined with emotions, specifically feelings of (dis)-belonging that influence how we move within, stay, and leave the field that is characterized by sometimes transient social relationships (Sections 5 & 6). I will outline how I experienced mobility and relations in the field as having a strong impact on what I perceived as a blurring of "public" and "private" contexts (Section 7) and how I reflected on this tension in the diary (Section 8). Lastly, I attempt to contextualize the status of the diary as an example of a fractally recurring distinction pertaining to a resignified public/private opposition within the whole research process that extends beyond the fieldwork phase (Section 9). I also touch on ethical issues related to this distinction. I conclude with the implications I drew from this experience for adjusting my research methods (Section 10).

2 Introducing events and pathways

The whole doctoral project started with a disruption. I moved to Vienna in March 2020, less than two weeks before the Austrian government issued the first lockdown, meaning that social contacts and social life had to be reduced to a minimum in order to diminish the spread of the Covid-19 virus. Japan had reacted to the pandemic situation by banning new entries to the country and decided not to issue any new visas. I

originally scheduled the fieldwork phase for the second year of my doctoral program. The trip had to be postponed several times and I had to wait one year to be able to enter the country. The restrictions were gradually lifted in 2022 and I received the notification of the host university to be able to enter the country in February that year. I had less than two months to prepare for leaving Vienna in order to arrive by the start of the new Japanese semester in April. It was an ambivalent situation for me. I had just settled in a new shared apartment in Vienna, and in the next moment, I found myself in a haste to prepare to move to Tokyo and start fieldwork. At the same time, I was glad to finally be able to go back and reconnect with my social network there. After settling down in Tokyo, I started my research and journaling. The following extract from an entry describes a scene and thoughts that I noted down after over four months into fieldwork.[1]

Extract from one entry of the fieldwork diary

17.08.2022 Mittwoch Abend/Nacht
After the interview with [   ], I went to an Izakaya with Naoya and Anna. 3 年ぶりだったからすごく話が盛り上がった。Es war echt schön mit den beiden zu sprechen. Annas Japanisch ist auch extrem gut. Ich glaube es war vor 3 Jahren auch schon gut, aber nun, dass sie in einer japanischen Firma arbeitet, ist sie noch mehr … fluent? Zumindest soweit ich das beurteilen kann. Competence is related to fluency.

Ethnographic questions, mobility, feelings
Ich merke immer wieder, dass sich Privates und Arbeit immer weiter (?) / wieder verschmelzen. Ich fange an, Freunde zu erforschen. Per se ist daran ja nichts schlechtes. Interaktional-soziolinguistische Forschung arbeitet ja durchaus öfters mit Freunden (s. Tannen, Sierra). Allerdings ist es dann auch so, dass ich irgendwie arbeite, wenn ich mit

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1   I have kept the syntactic and stylistic idiosyncrasies of this text fragment. All names are pseudonyms.

Freunden unterwegs bin. Das liegt allerdings auch ein bisschen an meiner Forschungsfrage oder meinen Forschungsinteresse. Was mich ja ursprünglich interessiert ist die Spontaneität von metapragmatischer Aktivität. „Plötzliches", situatives, dekontextualisiertes (?) Charakterisieren von sprachlichen Praktiken. Und die sind eben so gewöhnlich, dass es mir dann auffällt, wenn ich mit Freunden unterwegs bin.

Allerdings bleibt dabei immer ein Unbehagen zurück, weil ich ethisch immer ausloten muss, wie viel ich nun studiere / observiere und wie viel ich einfach nur auf der freundschaftlichen Ebene gegenwärtig bin.

Translation of the entry from the fieldwork diary

17.08.2022 Wednesday evening/night
After the interview with [   ], I went to an izakaya with Naoya and Anna. It's been three years, so our talk was so exciting. It was really nice to talk to them. Anna's Japanese is also extremely good. I think it was already good three years ago, but now that she is working in a Japanese company, she is even more … fluent? As long as I can assess it. Competence is related to fluency.

Ethnographic questions, mobility, feelings
I notice again and again that private and work are further (?) / again merging. I start to do research on friends. It's not something negative per se. Interactional sociolinguistics often works with friends (see Tannen, Sierra). But it is also somehow like I'm working when I'm out with friends. This is also kind of because of my research questions or research interest. What I'm originally interested in is the spontaneity of metapragmatic activity. "Sudden," situated, decontextualized (?) characterizations of linguistic practices. And it is so common that I notice it when I'm out with friends.

However, there remains some discontent, because I always have to balance the ethical boundaries as to what extend I'm studying / observing and to what extend I'm just present as a friend.

This is the first instance in the diary in which I mention a merging of "private" and "work," because in the first paragraph of the entry, I was thinking about Anna's competence in Japanese in a setting which was not fieldwork for me, but leisure time (after conducting an interview with someone else for my research on that day). The next paragraph contextualizes this thought with reference to two researchers in interactional sociolinguistics and the nature of the research topic I chose. I regard the last paragraph as especially relevant for the ensuing reflection. I describe that these thoughts left me with a feeling of discontent and pondering over ethical issues that frame how I view my relations with friends and interlocutors in the field. It appears that I do not want to do research with or on friends. This might be an abstract attempt to keep interactions with friends (private) and interactions in work-related contexts such as interviews (public) separate. In subsequent entries in this diary, I labeled this distinction as *public/private*. The merging of these two spheres and how it affects the research process and my methods continuously surfaces in this diary.

The conditions that structure the interaction at the izakaya are contingent on *mobility*—me moving back to Japan to reconnect with Naoya and Anna, both of whom I met in 2017 when I was studying in Tokyo. During fieldwork, I repeatedly thought about the conditions and effects of mobility and the act of moving or relocation, in particular. I exercised what might be called *reflexive mobility*.

3 Reflexive mobility

When reflecting on mobility in my research context, I think of a rather privileged form of mobility that can be defined as the (in)ability to move across spaces physically. This concept originated in mobility and transportation studies. Cairns (2017: 415) defines reflexive mobility as social actors' reflection on their moving choices and "that choice [is] contingent upon societal response; for instance, receiving approval from one's peers, colleagues and, in particular, superiors." He claims that

the better the societal response to moving choices is, the more successful is the sojourner's overall moving experience. I find this view on mobility, reflexivity, and individuals' choices a bit too simplistic. Reflecting on mobility, I would argue, is not only about reflecting about one's mobility choices and entirely contingent on societal response, but a deeper personal or subjective engagement with the emotions, experiences, and broader social conditions that surround and frame the process of moving. I want to accentuate the bodily and emotional dimension of this process. Reflexive mobility may also go beyond the subjective and extend to reflections of mobility in the context of societal constraints and structuring forces that may influence a subject's (in)ability to physically move and intermittently settle across different spaces. Reflexive mobility is here understood as a person's reflection and interpretation of moving bodies and moving practices. Therefore, I do not discuss reflections on social upward mobility in terms of improving one's socioeconomic status here.[2]

Mobility, we see, is movement or motion, not only physical, but also emotional. In the Japanese context, mobility is extensively investigated with reference to migrants' sense of belonging to Japan (Liu-Farrer 2020), or migration of Japanese nationals to other parts of the world, such as Europe (Klien 2020). These studies indicate that, boiled down to simple terms, individuals move to pursue a better life. The focus of this strand of research is, however, on mid- to long-term migrants and permanent residents. The researcher's sense of belonging during temporary moving periods (e.g., to Japan when they are not residing there or abroad) has hitherto not been considered in discussions about mobility. Recently, (auto-)ethnographic studies on mobile individuals' experiences of using language are emerging in the field of (Japanese) applied linguistics (Kawakami et al. 2022; Miyake & Arai 2021). These researchers call for incorporating subjective and self-reflexive perspectives to understand the emotional processes and practices that

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2   For a discussion on reflexivity and social mobility, see, e.g., Archer (2007). See also Urry (2007) for a comprehensive discussion on the impact of movement on individuals' lives.

individuals on the move engage in. These are people the researcher encounters in the field as well as researchers themselves. They emphasize the necessity to allow space for researchers to explore their own trajectories of mobile selfhood that formed their identities and influenced their research practices. Miyake & Arai (2021), for example, include columns in their edited volume where the contributors who are studying mobile individuals have space to briefly discuss their own mobile trajectories and how they became interested in language and mobility. Following their approach, I explore my own reflections on mobility. In the next section, I touch on general aspects pertaining to moving in academia, before I report on my own fieldwork and the conceptual tools that contextualize how I made sense of the overall experience.

4 Moving researchers

I am certainly not the only researcher reflecting on personal mobility and how moving impacts one's life. Researchers move for various reasons. In the contemporary neoliberal university environment, where employment is characterized by rather short fixed-term positions, they may move to work at a different institution; doctoral students may move to enroll at a specific institution that offers a program in their specialization or to work with a specific supervisor. Moving for work always has a profound impact on one's private sphere. Fieldwork in a country other than one's affiliated institution or place of residence is another reason for moving and is framed by specific institutional regulations and conditions, such as the length of the stay, funding, etc. Moving to a place "far away" was arguably the dominant mode of Western ethnographic enquiry for a long time. The specific act of moving (and reflecting on it) is sometimes discussed in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, but not so much in Japanese studies, particularly in the European context.

   Various researchers have reflected on their fieldwork experiences in Japan and addressed, among other aspects, codes of ethics (e.g.,

Robertson 2009), anthropologists' experiences and lessons they accumulated in the field (e.g., Bestor et al. 2003), and practical guidelines for young scholars who plan to do fieldwork (e.g., Kottmann & Reiher 2020). However, they do not discuss the researcher's reflection on emotions and broader societal conditions of moving. Alexy & Cook (2019) present a chapter on how the contributors in their edited volume designed their ethnographies building on intimate relationships in contemporary Japan, but they do not address moving to or from the field site. It appears that there are ample descriptions of how (Western) researchers move *in* Japan and how they make sense of their encounters and obstacles, but discussions on access and moving to the field site are missing from the overall picture. I will shed light on this aspect in the next section, where I address how moments of disruption could be turned into a resource.

5 Before fieldwork

Moving to Japan was, as described when introducing the events, impeded by governmental entry restrictions. Not knowing when I could prepare to enter the country left me with uncertainty. As the situation was constantly changing, it was impossible to plan ahead for the next months. Of course, this situation of uncertainty has affected not only me, but many researchers who work at institutions outside Japan. It had a particularly detrimental effect to the wellbeing of PhD students working on Japan-related topics that require to do fieldwork in the country (Sasaki 2022: 4). They were caught in a limbo, not knowing if and when they could carry out their fieldwork projects. In other words, this situation can be framed as a matter of denied institutional access to the field site.

   While denied access evidently obstructs research projects, moments of struggle and disruption can sometimes be turned into a resource for ethnographies (e.g., Hassemer & Flubacher 2020). I now understand this in retrospect, as I have realized that my fieldwork started some time before I could actually move to what I designated as the field. It started

when I was still in Vienna, in the preparatory phase, but during a time when the prospects of obtaining a visa for Japan and moving there were quite grim. Not being able to enter Japan has made me reconsider my original research design. I shifted "the field" from Japan to my social network in Vienna and asked friends if they would be interested in sharing some of their interactional routines with L1 speakers of Japanese with me. Later, I understood that if I want to study people on the move, it appears as evident to look for them not only in one country, but at multiple sites (Marcus 1995). This claim has also been made in ethnographies in the field of Japanese studies (e.g., Klien 2020: 203).

One day in spring 2021 in Vienna, I was talking about the challenges I was facing with my fieldwork with some friends. I expressed my frustration about the overall situation and felt a bit hopeless about the future of my project. One of my friends was in a similar situation. At that time, she was planning to move to Japan to live together with her Japanese fiancé, but had difficulties obtaining a visa. She offered me to participate in my project by recording her weekly online interactions in Japanese with her partner. Although I was grateful that she offered me to participate, initially I was reluctant to deviate from my original plan to collect data only in Japan and not to include friends of mine. At that point I was already fearing that the private time I was spending with them could stand in conflict with my professional time (in public) as a researcher who is supposed to collect linguistic data according to robust methods. However, in retrospect, I think this was the first step toward an ethnographic experience, the starting point of a line of thinking about methods in general, questioning how I approach the field. This experience also made me think about how to establish contact in times of immobility, and what the relation between my private free time and public professional time could be.

So far, I have addressed emotions of a rather negative sort, such as discontent, uncertainty, frustration, and hopelessness, which were evoked by social circumstances out of my control and had a severe impact on the preparatory phase of my fieldwork. Having overcome the uncertainties that characterized this phase, I entered Japan in April 2022 and I therefore now turn to my experiences during fieldwork.

6 Belonging and position during fieldwork

Belonging and feelings of attachment are one type of emotion that informs mobile individuals' experiences. How I make sense of feelings of belonging is something I was repeatedly confronted with during my fieldwork as well and I have several entries that are labeled "belonging" in my diary. How do I think about my relationship to the country (*place-belongingness*), and how do I feel about my status as a researcher? It was an ambivalent situation. I was someone coming back to Tokyo who used to live there as a resident for some time as a fully-enrolled MA student. Now coming back for a delimited period,[3] I found myself in a conflicted position. I tried to balance the professional part as someone receiving money from a Japanese academic institution to conduct research for one year with my personal self, someone who comes back to a place that is filled with memories. I naturally wanted to reconnect with the many people who stayed after I left in 2019 upon completing my program. In a sense, I occupied the same position as an exchange student, who typically spends one year in Japan, but also a totally different position, with a clear academic work-related plan of what to do during my time there. What is more, I felt that I was older than most exchange students, and that I probably had more prior experiences living in the country.

My liminal status was also mirrored by interlocutors. I was often asked if I was working or studying in Japan; if I was an exchange student or a working person ("does doctoral research count as work?"); why I was affiliated with institutions in Austria and Japan at the same time; why I was staying for one year, etc. While these were reasonable questions to ask a foreign researcher, I also perceived them as somewhat alienating me from friends, fellow researchers, and other interlocutors.

Having explored feelings of belonging as one spatial dimension of mobility, I now turn to a more temporal experience of mobility. While engaging in mobile practices is connected to places, mobility also

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3   My time during my MA was not limited, as I initially left the question open of whether to leave Japan or stay upon completing my program.

indexes temporariness, or *transience* of social configurations and encounters. Lønsmann et al. (2017: 265) underline that the concept of transience "foreground[s] the *temporality* of norm formation, located within the practices between people *on the move*, somewhere along a timeline that has a beginning and an end" (emphasis in original). In transient configurations, people come together, engage in various practices, and go separate ways. Although many ethnographies illustrate that fieldwork relations can be enduring, spanning over (virtual) spaces and years, I experienced moments in which I felt this transience, the fleetingness of some encounters, during my fieldwork as well. Practices that were established during my collaboration with individuals in the field emerged, were maintained over some time, and then sometimes partially suspended when I left Japan. Transience had also an influence on my emotions. Being aware that my time for on-site fieldwork would be limited to one year (and I could tell from my other stays that one year is not as long as one might assume), I felt pressure and anxiety, oriented towards my research and social relations. Would I collect enough data to write a dissertation? Can I live up to the standards of academic fieldwork? Could I "immerse" myself enough into the Japanese society? Could I establish a network with other academics?—a proleptic thought aimed at structuring my future career as an aspiring researcher. Financial and institutional constraints also shape transnational projects. In my case, I knew from the start that it would be impossible to extend my fellowship. And the pandemic entry restrictions that the Japanese government enforced over approximately two years left me with the impression that it would be extremely difficult to come to Japan again, in case I would need to suspend my fieldwork for some reason or if I were to come back later. All these thoughts recur in reflections on mobility and its constraints.

Some fieldworkers claim that emotions cannot be separated from methods and that science in general cannot be separated from emotional dispositions that the people engaging in science hold (Davies 2010; Devereux 1967). I gradually came to realize that emotions are also interwoven with the ideologies we hold toward specific research procedures, or how social relations in the field are structured. Lo Bosco

(2021: 15), for example, describes how "feelings of doubt, uncertainty, hesitation and vulnerability" have shaped her analysis of ethnographic data. For me, these emotions were oriented toward broader societal conditions that impacted my mobility before moving, as described above, but they were also oriented toward social relations and a perceived blurring of what I constructed as distinct spheres of public/private during fieldwork.

7 Public/private and field relations

When I first tried to conceptually approach what I labeled in my diary as "public" and "private," I took into consideration that my understanding of public/private might differ from definitions we find in sociological literature.[4] I equaled "private" to free, leisure time with friends, and "public" to work-related time and social relations (interviews, for example), as already labeled in the extract from the diary. The labeling of scenes and interactions as private or public is often done retrospectively (Gal 2005: 29); therefore, reflecting on my usage these labels in writing, I now understand them as a resignification of an *ideological* distinction. That is a reinterpretation or reconfiguration of meaning I attributed to what I experienced as recurring, salient scenes and encounters during the fieldwork period that, in my view, should be differentiated. I regard public/private as my "folk terminology." This ideology may be influenced by a Western idea of a public/private distinction that characterizes these as distinct social spaces (Gal 2005). A perceived collapse through mutual infiltration of these spaces made me slightly uncomfortable in the early stage of the fieldwork, when I sensed that I applied a professional gaze in a non-professional context. As an ideology, the public/private opposition is a partial view and constructed compartmentalization of social events, experiences, and

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4 For example, "the public" is often discursively constructed as a counter-arena to the field of linguistics as an academic discipline (Spitzmüller 2019). Without consulting much literature on this topic, I intuitively placed academic work into the public realm and labeled diary entries accordingly.

relations that I classified as belonging to either public or private social realms. My conception of this distinction is then more precisely called a *language* ideology (Gal 2005; Irvine & Gal 2000), a partial view on language use and my research on language use that is projected onto ideas of how communication in social events and social relations might be differentiated. This opposition is therefore associated with forms of communication and contact (Gal 2005: 25). While being aware that these two spheres constitute extremes on a continuum, a blurring of this conjectured distinction evoked a feeling of discontent, as I initially outlined.

How did this ideological resignification come into being for me? My conviction that I should keep these realms separate might be informed by sociological literature on research design that stipulates procedures and justifications for participant selection. Too much personal or private engagement with research participants may be seen as having a potential influence on my interpretation of the data. From an ethnographic perspective, however, thinking about the different degrees and nuances of building rapport is at the center of methodological reflection.[5] In order to assure myself that research counts as "proper work," I thought that it would be necessary to divide social relations and spaces into two distinct spheres. I was then confronted with the question of whether I can "use" friends to help me with my research, or whether I should "leave" them in the private realm.

Another anchor point on which the public/private distinction operates is moving. Balancing work, my professional self—a researcher who came to Japan to collect data, or a *professional stranger* in ethnographic terms (Agar 1996), a self that I wanted to present to my interactants—was confronted with a natural wish to reconnect with friends, make new friendships, and enjoy my private life there.

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5   While in ethnographies on Japan, ethnographers' relations with interlocutors in the field are described as degrees of *intimacy* (in a broad sense) or *closeness* (e.g., Alexy & Cook 2019), linguistic anthropologists have conceptualized social relations in fieldwork as *rapport* (Goebel 2019, 2021), or the conflicting nature of contact as *discordance* (Takekuro 2018).

Gradually, personal relationships merged into participations to my research project. At the same time, I had the feeling that I wanted to keep my work-related relationships apart from my personal relationships. This led to a feeling of discontent that I described in the extract from my diary. I was asking myself if want to let go of these chances to collect data. There are two reasons why this tension arose. First, as outlined in the introduction, the field was less demarcated than in other ethnographies. I was surrounded by it all the time and perhaps the most interesting insights came from interactions with people during a time that I did not consider research time or fieldwork in the strict sense. Nevertheless, these interactions caught my interest and I noted them down in my diary. They left a trace. Second, the phenomena I was interested in where so broad (initially perhaps too broad) that I encountered them in unexpected places. People address issues of communicative competence in various circumstances. I anticipated this, but saw myself confronted with assessing the relationship between research time and private time. Keeping a diary was then the best way to note down my insights from what I perceived as two arenas in one document, trying to represent them in the same way.

8 The diary

Initially, this diary was not intended to become so relevant. Through writing, however, I understood that this text visualized or materialized my growing assumption that I could not and did not need to keep public/private apart. This distinction also collapsed with and within the text. A short explanation on the contents and extent of the diary is in order here. Mostly, this diary does not comprise real-time notetaking of observations I made, but rather post-reflections, entextualized reflections on situations I experienced during my research time and my private time (and in-between), usually written on the same day, or one to two days later. I recorded daily activities, people I met, places I visited, and my research activities and progress. Some entries are only a few sentences long, others extend over several pages. Sometimes I made ad

hoc audio recordings to capture my thoughts as well. I started to note down insights concerning my research and reflections on interviews upon entering Japan, but moved to more systematic day-by-day journaling in August 2022.

This diary gradually merged with a conventional diary that I am keeping for ten years now. In that diary, I note down activities and emotions per day and sometimes more complex reflections on some periods in my life, such as reflections on a passing year. In some entries of the fieldwork diary, I develop or sketch theoretical ideas, something I was doing in written form in a separate notebook since I started the doctoral project. I now understand this diary as a condensed form of a biographical record that I formed over the year into a text(-artifact) that "may be recontextualized in future contexts of reading" (Nozawa 2007: 157). This works via anticipation or imagination of these future contexts and potential broadening of the participation framework. For instance, some segments may be disclosed to an audience, such as the participants in the workshop in which a first draft of this text was discussed, or the readers of this published article. The "diachronic flavor" of this text is thus shaped by presupposition and creation of these contexts on various scales (Nozawa 2007).

9 Nestings, recursions, and ethics

The perceived discomfort experienced by blurring boundaries of public/private before and during fieldwork was captured in the diary. At the same time, the diary for me was, for most of the time, a rather private text in which sometimes public issues were reflected upon. Thinking about its status after fieldwork, I think that it illustrates *nested* indexical relationships between the resignified public/private nexus, social relations, and texts. Social relations in the field point to my imagined public/private nexus. The diary discusses this relationship but at the same time also points back to this nexus when private experiences and thoughts on my research merge within the text, and when I use parts of its content and transport it into the public, such as discussing it at the

workshop and writing an article about it. These relations are embedded at different scales that frame the research process, and can be described as *fractal recursions* (Gal 2005; Irvine & Gal 2000). Fractal recursion is a semiotic process in which an interdiscursive chain of opposition or distinction emerges on different axes. It starts from reinterpreting *work vs. leisure* as *public vs. private*. These distinctions index my engagement with various interlocutors and my organization of resources and activities that are associated via ideologies. For example, one axis relates to communication technology. At one point during the fieldwork period, I realized that the messaging app I was using to chat with my friends in Japan was the same app I used to contact potential research participants. The distinction work/leisure was surfacing here again, pointing to, or being nested, within my internal public/private resignification.

Another axis surfaces within the contents of the diary, as outlined above. In other words, the public/private distinction is transported into, and hence projected onto, this text artifact. This artifact is my reflection and a metapragmatic discourse on communication in and out of the field. The distinction is projected onto yet another axis when producing a manuscript for the workshop in which these issues were discussed, and when I later formed the manuscript into this article. In the writing process, I reflect on how much from my privately recorded thoughts that came up during fieldwork can be shared with others, such as readers of this publicly accessible published text. A diary is usually a text-artifact not shared with an audience.[6] This understanding of a diary stands in contrast to the paragraphs in which I develop theoretical and method(olog)ical ideas and reflections on my interviews, which I regarded as potential texts to be shared (perhaps even as a vignette) with an audience, e.g., readers of the dissertation or publications that circulate among scholars.

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6   Notwithstanding that there is certainly also a literary genre of published diaries, sharing a diary that was written during fieldwork can reveal the researcher's somewhat disturbing stances that may not be intended to be circulated among others (see Malinowski 1967 as an example).

However, ethical issues, especially issues of consent, also have to be considered on yet another axis. I accumulated various insights while living in Tokyo, not only while being in the field or rather "on the job." Throughout the day, I noted down observations I had during social encounters in my diary. Now, upon returning and reflecting on this data, I am still unsure how and if I can use these insights. Of course, some people that are mentioned in this diary did not give their consent to be observed (although in the vignette from the diary, I do not consider what I noticed as observation) or publicly mentioned in a research piece like this. Gaining consent afterwards is also subject to discussion. Even for those recordings I explicitly gained consent for, ethical questions remain. For example, segments of private talk that was recorded for me are transported into the realm of the public as transcripts embedded in texts. Are my participants fully aware of the implications of this academic life of texts? Texts come into being through processes of *entextualization* (becoming a text) and undergo *contextualization* (embedding of text in a social world), where data flows within the text through the world, as they may be iterated (*cited*) and therefore *recontextualized* in other publications (Bauman & Briggs 1990). They develop their own dynamics that may be hard to capture. Because not only texts, but snippets of lives are shared to an audience. What is more, while unacquainted people may not able to identify the participants I mention in texts, common friends may indeed be able to do so. How would they react? What we can see here is another fractal recursion in which the public/private nexus is nested in recurring ethical considerations. I experienced a form of interdependence of social relations that is inherent in the *precariousness* of fieldwork, but also has the potential to be transformed into a resource to understand the overall experience (Hassemer & Flubacher 2020). The public/private distinction therefore also concerns ethical questions of data collection, thus extending way beyond the spatiotemporal field.

10 How methods evolved

Lastly, I want to address how my reflections during fieldwork described above have helped to modify my methods and rethink my work after coming back. For example, (self-)reflexivity has helped me to understand how my research interest of discourse and competence in the context of Japan and Japanese can be applied to myself. The phenomena I am interested in are phenomena that I immediately experienced through my subject position as an L2 user of Japanese. I was aware of this position before going to Japan, but it became more salient after conducting research there. For example, when I ask participants about their perceptions of belonging, how they feel about being in Japan and using Japanese, I noticed in writing that I (recursively) directed the same question to myself. What makes me study about Japan and Japanese and keep coming back to the country? The same can be said about communicative competence in Japanese. I tried to find out how my interlocutors construct and perceive it, but I had to ask myself how I perceive my competence. Some entries clearly show that I had doubts about, for example, my abilities to conduct interviews in Japanese—my *meta-communicative* competence in interviewing (Briggs 1986)—and how my competence is perceived by others. I feared that others would implicitly question my competence to conduct research on and in Japanese as a so-called non-native speaker, who is only temporarily affiliated with a Japanese institution and based in Europe. To understand experiences, emotions, tensions, and the messiness of fieldwork, I turned to diligently noting down my thoughts.

I now regard this diary as a method in itself and a reflection on methods at the same time. It is a tool for understanding, a way to interpret what is going on while doing research. For example, after every interview and encounter with potential research participants, I wrote down my impressions of the scene, reflecting on the situation and on myself. I also coded paragraphs in the diary with subheadings and this helped me to identify recurrent topics, not only related to my research questions, but to how I perceived my being and position Japan. I gradually became aware that a more subjective view on experiences

may be more promising to capture how metapragmatic discourse on competence unfolds. Through the diary, I could take on a first-person perspective that is in accordance with subjective perspectives on language use in applied linguistics, emphasizing the "I" at the center of interactional experiences (Busch 2013: 13–79). If I experience tensions and reflect on these experiences and tensions, so do my participants, I assumed. I started to work more systematically with this diary and integrated the insights I gained from writing into my methods. I realized that using language and reflecting on one's competence in language(s) is an emotional and subjective experience that is mediated through perceptions of self and others (see, e.g., Merleau-Ponty 2012 [1945]).

This insight made it necessary to shift toward a *repertoire* approach, inspired by phenomenology (Busch 2012). I readjusted my focus to investigate explicit metapragmatic activity that emerges in L2 users' narratives about using different resources, not only Japanese, because I understood that Japanese is one resource among others for my mobile interlocutors. I asked my participants to draw language portraits (see, e.g., Busch 2013) for me and on the basis of these portraits, I could explore their perceptions of their linguistic repertoire, competences, and how these were shaped by past interactions. In these narrative interviews, my interlocutors offered emotional depictions of belonging and their being in Japan, as well as tensions they experienced in their negotiation of competence while using Japanese in private and public contexts. Here, I could discover that the issues related by my interlocutors share many similarities with my own experiences in the research process.

Finally, I could also explore my own and my interlocutors' (reflexive) mobility and moving trajectories through this subjective approach, as mobility is experienced primarily through the body, in physical as well as emotional movement. I think that particularly sharpening the ethnographic dimension of my project has helped me to apply a reflexive lens and to reconsider the methodological foundation of my research.

11 Conclusion

The ideas I presented in this contribution are probably something that many doctoral students doing fieldwork dwell on, but spaces to engage in discussion on its implications on the research process are limited in academic publishing. One reason might be that for many scholars, the private is not supposed to be part of academic rigor. But it seems that we can at least embrace these ideas in anthropological and applied linguistic research that questions such a veiling of the researcher's own position. Therefore, I tried to illuminate in this contribution how my reflections on conditions of mobility in fieldwork are helpful to make sense of the lived research process. I used concepts that I conventionally employ when analyzing my data to analyze my own experience. Through writing, I understood that my emotions that respond to interactions with individuals during my research in Japan are shaped by the conditions of moving to, within, and away from the field. Emotions are interwoven with ideologies that I hold about how I structure my time, space, relations, and encounters with others.

A recurring question was how and if I can keep work and private life separate. Such resignified ideologies of public/private are informed by my ideas of what an ideal research design for a doctoral project should look like, as academic projects are framed by specific generic requirements and expectations. Through fractal recursion, this distinction is projected onto different axes, such as the diary and this article.

Finally, I explained that turning toward journaling and reflecting on my diary, an entextualized subjective representation of experience, facilitated my considerations concerning what kind of adjustments to my methods could be made during the fieldwork period. This led to a deeper engagement with a repertoire approach toward language, i.e., language portraits and narrated experiences of communication, thus opening up the possibility of exploring subjective perspectives: my own and those of my interlocutors.

Acknowledgments

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