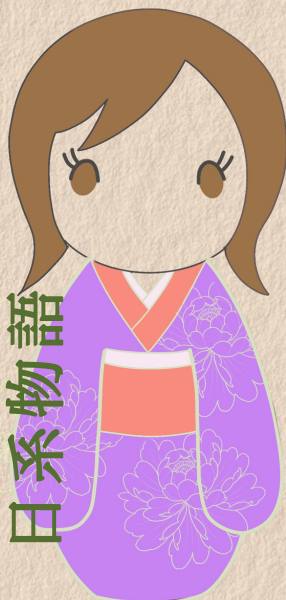
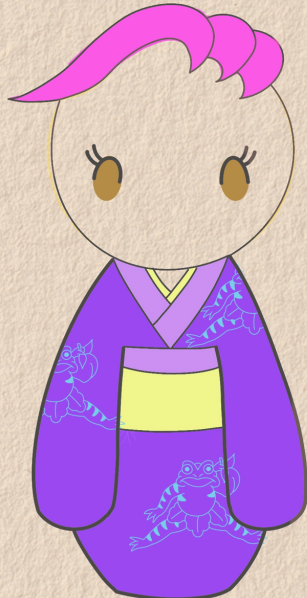
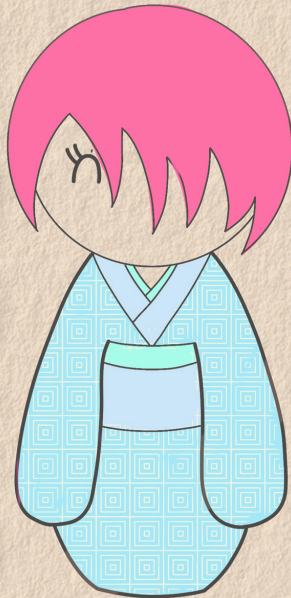


Vol. 2

AM I THE LANGUAGE(S) THAT I SPEAK? ON HISTORY, LANGUAGE, AND NIKKEI IDENTITY

NIKKEI MONOGATARI



“

*If I claim my Japanese heritage without proving my language abilities to people, I'm a fraud. On top of that, how can I label myself a Québécois without speaking French properly? Who am I?*

*--Alexa Toguri-Laurin*

**WORKS BY**

ELÉONORE KOMAI  
SACHI KIKUCHI  
NOEMI TAKEBAYASHI CABALLERO  
ALEXA TOGURI-LAURIN  
AURORA TSAI

**COVER ART BY**

PJ PATTEN



## Nikkei Monogatari

### Volume 2

# Am I the Language(s) that I Speak? On History, Language, and Nikkei Identity

Toronto, Canada  
© Japanese for Nikkei, 2022

Open Access

Email: [connect@japanesefornikkei.com](mailto:connect@japanesefornikkei.com)

[www.japanesefornikkei.com](http://www.japanesefornikkei.com)

Works by authors and artists can not be reproduced in print or any other media without their written permission. To contact individual authors, please see the Contributor Bios and/or contact us.



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## **ELÉONORE KOMAI - 3**

be

## **SACHI KIKUCHI - 4**

Bilingual Wordplay

## **NOEMI TAKEBAYASHI CABALLERO - 8**

Am I the Language(s) that I  
Speak?

## **ALEXA TOGURI-LAURIN - 10**

Domo-Merci: Forgetting my  
Japanese as a Nikkei  
Québécois

## **AURORA TSAI - 15**

Story-telling as a Means to  
Recognize and Resist our  
Injustices

“

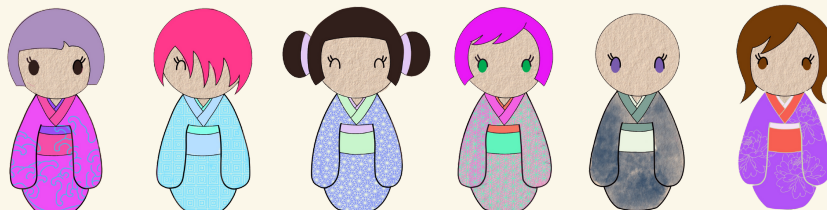
*So, am I the languages  
that I speak? ... It is an  
alluring mix of  
languages, experiences,  
and cultures that makes  
us who we are.*

*--Noemi Takebayashi Caballero*

“

*I speak  
all they hear are  
chaotic whispers  
I forgot their language  
a long time ago  
have I learnt ever*

*--Eléonore Komai*



# BEHIND THE SCENES

By Mimi Okabe and Catherine Sachi Kikuchi

We are so thrilled to see the second volume of *Nikkei Monogatari*!

The title of this volume, “Am I the Language(s) that I Speak? On History, Language, and Nikkei Identity,” pays homage to the guest speakers we hosted through our *Nikkei Spotlight Series*, an online speaker series created for our community to celebrate the voices of Japanese Canadians and Americans, as well as those who have connections to Japan, giving talks on their field of expertise. We have been honoured to have Dr. Lisa Hofmann-Kuroda, who gave a presentation titled “Who Speaks: Teaching and Translating Japanese from a Language Justice Perspective,” followed by Dr. Aurora Tsai and Dr. Yuki Yamazaki’s talk, “Hafu Women Navigating the Japanese Workforce and The Way They Were Marginalized Due to Their Gender, Race, and Language.” Both lectures, which are available on our YouTube page (Japanese for Nikkei), inspired us to critically explore questions of history, identity, and language to which we have dedicated this volume.

The works included in this volume explore, in various ways, the intersections of identity, language, and culture. Eléonore Komai’s poem “be” provides a sensory exploration of her pursuit of navigating the borders of belonging and non-belonging through her powerful and evocative imagery of speech and silence. Our very own Sachi Kikuchi takes a playful approach to language, sharing Japanese jokes through puns sure to get you giggling in “Bilingual Wordplay.” She also provides a handy list of vocabulary for our readers to learn! Noemi Takebayashi Caballero’s contribution deals directly with the volume’s theme of language and identity through her perspective as a mixed-race individual (Mexican and Japanese) in “Am I the Language(s) that I Speak?”

Alexa Toguri-Laurin's "Domo-Merci: Forgetting my Japanese as a Nikkei Québécois" provides an insightful exploration of what it means to be Nikkei in a trilingual Canadian context. She maps her identity across intersecting personal and Francophone histories in an informative, personal essay. Aurora Tsai, who has been a supporter of *Nikkei Monogatari* from its inception, offers a personal reflection that explores the challenges in pinpointing identity based on the factor of language alone. Her piece serves as a springboard from which we hope our readers will feel inspired to learn more about language injustice and to work towards what she describes as "community healing." The list of scholarly works listed in her references is a great place to start for those eager to learn more.

At the end of the day, being questioned about your knowledge and understanding of your heritage, culture, and language based on your physical appearance can unsettle your sense of identity and belonging, but we hope that the works included in this volume uplift you and that you find solidarity with our contributors in each your own way.

Finally, for this volume, we commissioned former JFN student and friend PJ Patten for the cover art. PJ Patten is a self-taught graphic illustrator, tattoo artist, and poet whose work is influenced by the intersection of his Japanese heritage with his American military upbringing. Having gone through one of our programs and knowing that he is a source of bright energy and light, we felt that his awareness of what we do and his own pursuit of learning the Japanese language fell into place when discussing options for our cover art. We are so thankful for PJ and the work that he produces! To learn more, please visit <https://www.pjpattenart.com/>.

# be

By Eléonore Komai

---

*be*

*I breathe  
their gazes turn toward my face  
my mouth opens  
words cannot find their way out*

*I feel  
their power of attraction  
that draws me always closer  
in a movement of mutual repulsion*

*I stare  
at the hollows of my eyelids  
all I can see are their paintings  
the colors never blend*

*I speak  
all they hear are chaotic whispers  
I forgot their language a long time ago  
have I learnt ever*

*I smell  
the perfume of their curiosity  
the mixture of fragrances burns my eyes  
are we strangers or friends*

*too many failed attempts to coalesce  
too many successful breakthroughs  
my desire to  
belong  
has  
been*

*e  
x  
h  
a  
u  
s  
t  
e  
d  
.*

# BILINGUAL WORDPLAY

By Sachi Kikuchi

---

Growing up in a bilingual environment allowed my friends, family, and I to enjoy an additional level of wordplay. Some of the jokes I'd like to share with you here range from ones fairly well-known throughout Japan, to ones that carry fond memories, and ones that have been created by my immediate family members.

Let's first start with the ones that are more likely to be known throughout Japan!

- 1) 日本の海はジャッパン  
*Nihon no umi wa jappān*

Vocabulary

日本 (*nihon/nippon*) - Japan

海 (*umi*) - ocean/sea

ジャッパン (*jappān*) - onomatopoeia that describes the sound of big waves crashing into each other or onto the shore.

What makes it funny?

It could be translated as “The waves in Japan are *crashing!*” (but imagine the “crashing” part being very animated). It's describing the oceans/seas in Japan, and the word that describes the sound of the waves is “*jappān*,” which sounds quite similar to the English word for the country. Get it? These waves are pretty patriotic, I guess!

- 2) クマだべあ～  
*Kuma da beā*

Vocabulary

クマ (*kuma*) - bear (can also be written in kanji as 熊)

What makes it funny?

This sentence means, “It's a bear.” The ending is a non-specific countryside dialect ending (~*bea*), which sounds very much like “bear” in English. For me personally, as someone with close connections to and a deep love for rural Japan, this one feels a bit special. One of my relatives has had a close call with a bear, and I can imagine some of my relatives potentially saying this as a way to lighten up a more serious situation. (Yikes!).





3) 僕の車が壊れた。ま、良いか～  
*Boku no kuruma ga kowareta. Ma, ikā*



#### Vocabulary

僕 (*boku*) - me/I (most often used by boys and men)

車 (*kuruma*) - car

壊れた (*kowareta*) - broken (past tense of 壊れる (*kowareru*), meaning to “to break”)

ま、良いか (*ma, ikā*) - although not a single word, this phrase basically means “Oh well”

What makes it funny?

These sentences can be translated as: “My car broke. Oh well.” Although most people may take their broken car situation more seriously, this person is fairly chill. But that’s not what makes it funny—it’s the fact that the “Oh well” part sounds like “my car” in English!

4) 掘った芋いじるな  
*Hotta imo ijiruna*

#### Vocabulary

掘った (*hotta*) - dug up (past tense of 掘る (*horu*), meaning “to dig”)

芋 (*imo*) - potato

いじる (*ijiru*) - to play with, to toy with, to touch, to tamper with (This verb has a variety of possible English translations!)

What makes it funny?

Literally, it means “Don’t touch the potatoes I dug up,” but it’s funny because it sounds similar to “What time is it now?” in English. There’s a bit of a legend behind this one—apparently, a Japanese speaker who wasn’t very proficient in English heard “What time is it now?” and misheard it as “Don’t touch the potatoes I dug up” and was really confused! I must admit, I still use this one sometimes because I have fond memories of a friend’s mom using this when I was a child at Japanese school.

Now that we've looked at a few pretty widely known ones, I'd like to share two that my family has made up (on the spot) within the past few years. Each takes place as a conversation between two people (A and B), and occurred in the family kitchen!

- 5) A: お茶ちょうだい  
*Ocha chōdai*  
B: チャイだよ。飲みチャイ?  
*Chai dayo. Nomichai?*

#### Vocabulary

お茶 (*ocha*) - tea  
ちょうだい (*chōdai*) - please (but very casual; often, learners are taught *ください* (*kudasai*) instead)  
チャイ (*chai*) - chai (as in the type of tea)  
飲み (*nomi*) - drink (an incomplete conjugation of the verb 飲む (*nomu*), meaning “to drink”)

What makes it funny?

Do you know how to say “X want(s) to drink” or “Does X want to drink?” in a casual way? It's 飲みたい (*nomitai*). In a more formal situation, we could say 飲みたいですか? (*nomitai desu ka?*) to ask, “Would you like to drink?” Here, A says, “Tea, please” and B responds with, “It's chai. Do you want it?” confirming whether A still wants the tea. However, instead of saying 飲みたい? (*nomitai?*) as they may have said otherwise, because the name of the tea has a similar sound, they incorporated wordplay and instead asked, 飲みチャイ? (*nomichai?*). Personally, I love this one!

- 6) A: うどん入れすぎたから具が入らないよ。  
*Udon iresugita kara gu ga hairanai yo.*  
B: それはノーグー  
*Sore wa nō gū*



## Vocabulary

うどん (*udon*) - udon noodles

入れすぎた (*iresugita*) - too much was put in (from the verb 入れる (*ireru*), meaning “to put in” and the past tense form of the ending ~すぎる (*sugiru*), meaning “too much”).

具 (*gu*) - ingredients/toppings (but not necessarily any ingredients - in this case, with udon, it would be the toppings and non-liquid parts of the soup base that gets added to the noodles)

入らない (*hairanai*) - won't fit (from the verb 入る (*hairu*), meaning “to go in” or sometimes, “to fit in” plus ~ない (*nai*), the negative ending)

それ (*sore*) - that

What makes it funny?

In this situation, there are multiple people assembling udon for the family for dinner. One person is putting the udon noodles in the bowls, and the other person is adding the toppings and soup in after, before taking it to the table. The problem with one of the bowls is that too many noodles were added, so there wasn't any more space for toppings and other ingredients! As a wordplay, B says **それはノーグー** (*sore wa nō gū*), meaning both “That's no good” and “That has no *gu* (toppings)”.

What did you think of these 6 different wordplays? Do you know of any others? Maybe you've heard others use them? Or maybe you're like me, and you and your family have come up with some fun ones that work as inside jokes.

Sometimes, it can be extra challenging to be studying the language of your ancestors. Maybe you're a child doing extra school even though you want to play instead. Maybe you're an adult, trying to (re)learn the language of your parents and grandparents, so that you can add another element to communication before you lose your chance to ask them certain questions. Maybe you're trying to (re)connect with your family history and relatives who are still in Japan, but struggling to find the time and energy that you want to dedicate to improving.

I'm not sure about you, but I've experienced all three of these in one way or another. Even though it can be hard, I always fight to hold on to the things that make me happy about language learning and maintenance. Reading manga, watching anime, listening to Japanese music from the '70s and '80s, keeping in touch with friends and family in Japan, making up silly jokes that rely on wordplay and multilingualism, remembering things that my grandmother said to me as a child... These are some of the things that have kept me focused and motivated to keep learning.

# AM I THE LANGUAGE(S) THAT I SPEAK?

By Noemi Takebayashi Caballero

---

Inevitably, language is part of our culture. Hence how Japanese you are is determined by how well you are able to speak the language—or, at least, that is the perception. In my opinion, third culture kids (TCKs) are citizens of the world without fully belonging to one country alone. They may speak and be fluent in a lot of different languages without fully belonging to one country. TCKs are rootless, which is why their identity cannot only be defined by the language(s) they speak. It is a combination of their experiences in all the different countries they've lived in that makes them who they are.

I live in my mother's culture, and I'm not immersed in my father's Japanese culture. Being **ハーフ** (*hāfu*) is both a blessing and a sea of confusion because you literally get to experience both cultures, but at the same time, there is no one standard to look up to. The media fails to represent us because we are a minority, which is why we are often expected to belong to both cultures, but that can be challenging.

Naturally, language is not the only part of a culture, but language definitely impacts how we should behave. Particularly Japanese, which has **敬語** (*keigo*, honorifics), compels one to speak with a particular level of respect. Not that it's a bad thing, but when we speak English, we can choose between casual and formal, and that's it. When speaking Japanese, we are expected to speak humbly, with a degree of respect or look down, which definitely influences how we act with people. Therefore, language impacts how we act, but it doesn't necessarily define who we are.

There is some controversy on the use of **ハーフ** (*hāfu*) as it literally means that you are half, as if you are not Japanese enough. So, it has been suggested to use **ダブル** (*daburu*) because you have a double nationality. Saying **ダブル** (*daburu*) may be correct because you are referring to one's mixed heritage and acknowledging one's Japaneseness. However, in truth, Japanese society fails to recognize that **ハーフ** (*hāfu*) are actually Japanese. This duality contributes to the marginalization of **ハーフ** (*hāfu*). We are seen as being different, treated differently and even talked to differently, many times because we are seen as foreigners.

In the attempt of trying to fit in by speaking Japanese, we are unwelcome in English-speaking communities. Not being able to speak Japanese tears our Japaneseness—or at least the half of it that we are given, and we end up being categorized as **外人** (*gaijin*, which can be used as a derogatory term for foreigners).

---

However, since we have an alternative, we seek shelter in our other culture(s) and in our other language(s). In my experience, I tend to forget words in every language, so I say them in another. And this makes me look like I am trying to show off when in reality, I just forget. Diversity makes us distinct. The languages we speak and can't speak don't fully determine our relationship to our cultural heritage and how we should act.

So, am I the languages that I speak? Definitely. But not solely. It is an alluring mix of languages, experiences, and cultures that makes us who we are. How society reacts to our Japaneseness—or lack thereof—makes us embrace one of our other cultures and languages. And that is what identity is all about. Identity is not static but based on individual contexts. Even so, language plays a role in how we perceive ourselves.

# DOMO-MERCI: FORGETTING MY JAPANESE AS A NIKKEI QUÉBÉCOIS

By Alexa Toguri-Laurin

---

Growing up as a fourth-generation Nikkei in Montréal, Québec, I'm constantly re-evaluating my identity based on my ethnocultural background, the language I speak at home, and carrying the burden that history placed on my ancestors. The current discourse surrounding French language protection and equity for linguistic minorities limits my desire to relearn Japanese. For the past 22 years of my life, I've been asking myself: "Do I really belong here?"

I was five years old when I attended my first Japanese lesson. Every Saturday morning, my mother escorted my siblings and I to Ms. Ebata's house, a close family friend. We would spend hours naming random objects, writing *hiragana* characters, and repeating common phrases. Sometimes, our lessons were spent lounging on her couch, watching *asa-dorama* on NHK while munching on *sembei* crackers.

After weeks of practice, I was able to introduce myself properly in Japanese: "*Watashi no namae wa, Toguri Tokimi desu* (My name is Tokimi Toguri)." That single sentence made my young soul glow with Nikkei pride. I was so excited to visit my grandfather and tell him everything I'd learned. I cherished his enthusiasm as he nodded with approval.

These lessons encouraged me to master Japanese and further connect with my culture. Although we speak English at home (with a little French on the side), I enjoyed including Japanese words in my sentences and applying my growing knowledge of the language. At six years old, I learned how to say colours, fruit, vegetables, directions, emotions and basic phrases. By twelve, I was able to piece a few sentences together to help my family navigate their way through the bustling streets of Tokyo during our family vacation in Japan. By fifteen, I could read, write and identify different *kanji* characters, which became handy when flexing my knowledge of Japanese to my friends.

Although I'm half-Japanese, learning the language helped me form an intimate connection with my heritage. Every lesson taught me more about my community's history in this country and the rich culture we have. I felt proud to belong to a resilient community and participate in keeping traditions alive, such as *mochitsuki* and *Obon matsuri*. It felt exciting to explore another side of my identity that was hidden from me.

Despite my Japanese drastically improving, I've realized that learning or speaking it in Québec isn't a priority.

In Québec, speaking French and English is essential for survival and fostering a bilingual society.

While I attended an English school on the West Island (a predominantly English-speaking area west of Montréal), most of my homework consisted of reciting French poems and reading English books. The expectation to excel in both languages challenged my burgeoning desire to learn more Japanese.

In 1977, the Charter of the French Language (Bill 101) was implemented to ensure the quality and usage of French. Parts of the bill include: newly-arrived immigrants must send their children to French schools, it is required that French is displayed on business signs and companies should hire employees with French proficiency. The *l'Office québécoise de la langue française* (OQLF) was created to regulate institutions that abide by the province's language charter.

The OQLF's efforts to protect French stirred up a frenzy among Anglophone and Allophone (non-French nor English speaking) communities. Montreal's Italian and Chinese-run businesses were given fines for not putting enough French on their storefront signs and restaurant menus. One of the biggest stories coming out of Québec was "Pastagate" in February 2013, where OQLF officials fined an Italian restaurant for using traditional words in their menu, such as *pasta* and *calamari* instead of French. The story spread like wildfire worldwide, covered by the Guardian, New York Times, CNN, Al Jazeera, and NPR.

With the recent adoption of Bill 96, Indigenous communities are pressured to prioritize French over their native languages, despite community efforts to revive their own language after years of displacement, genocide, exploitation and residential schools. Community leaders and activists say the bill creates more barriers for Indigenous youth from accessing resources to improve their quality of life, such as education.

The provincial government's push to ensure the survival of French was met with heavy criticism, resulting in demonstrations and an anti-Québec sentiment, known as "Québec-bashing," a term used to speak ill of the French language and Québécois self-determination. I won't go into too much detail retelling Québec's entire history, nor do I want to demonize the survival of French, but as I witness Québec's history unravel, I realized how crucial French fluency means for my future in this province. Getting a well-paying job and access to public services all depend on my ability to speak French.

I was on top of my game. I completed *kanji* and grammar worksheets with perfection, and I managed to hold a decent conversation with Ms. Ebata over the phone. At home, I felt more in tune with my Japanese heritage, and the identity crisis in my head was subdued when topics of Japanese culture popped up. I felt authentically Japanese because of my knowledge of the language and culture of my community. I felt like I truly belonged somewhere.

However, when I practice my French in public, I would get shunned by strangers if I made a mistake. I look like an embarrassment to my family, who worked hard to assimilate themselves into this province.

As Japanese Canadian internment survivors, my grandparents instilled assimilation strategies in my mother out of fear of her facing the same ostracization they experienced in British Columbia. Restarting your life in a province with a strong French presence, assimilation was key to survival. They had no room for error on their second chance at life, so they enrolled my mother into a French school and a summer camp in hopes of their child living a successful life.

In grade 9, I made an oath to myself that I will retain my knowledge of the Japanese language while devoting my time to further immerse myself in French out of respect for my grandparents and Québec's history. However, I gradually stopped studying Japanese and let my grammar books collect dust in the corner of my bedroom. I even refused to pick them up for fear of Japanese impeding my French learning. I paid extra attention in French class to memorize different verb tenses, vocabulary, figures of speech and grammar rules. Even though I attended French classes and tutoring sessions, I still couldn't grasp the language.



I grew anxious about making the Asian community look bad in front of Québécois society.

Oftentimes, immigrants are looked down upon by the Francophone community because of the challenges of integrating themselves into society. Immigrants feel pressure to speak French perfectly in order to be accepted. If you are unable to speak it fluently, you do not belong here. With that, I'm scared of pissing people off because of my limited French, but I'm trying my best to integrate myself into my own home. The unspoken rule is simple: if you don't speak French, you're not Québécois.

As the years went on, my knowledge of Japanese dissolved rapidly. I went from speaking fluently to simple phrases as I did at the beginning of my linguistic journey. I barely talk with Ms. Ebata anymore. She noticed how my sentences sound rusty and incomplete; our conversations became more English than Japanese. I felt like I let her down after all of those years we spent reviewing exercises together, as if her hard work went to waste.

The more I lost my Japanese, the more I lost myself. How can I be Japanese without being fluent in it? If I claim my Japanese heritage without proving my language abilities to people, I'm a fraud. On top of that, how can I label myself a Québécois without speaking French properly?

Who am I?

For years, I neglected Japanese to be a Québécois, someone who is fluent in French and fully immersed in society. I was born here, and so was my family. Despite being half-Japanese and Anglophone, I'm still a Québécois, and I belong here. Why would I have to push my Japanese identity aside to please everyone else?

As I made friends with people from different cultural backgrounds, I realized that you don't have to sacrifice your language or culture to be a Québécois. Most of my friends speak Japanese, Arabic, Spanish, Tagalog, Italian, Greek, Pashto, Vietnamese and Cantonese. Despite attending French schools and dealing with blatant discrimination, they still manage to hold onto their cultural-linguistic roots. I grew jealous of my friends who were able to speak their native language fluently and openly because they were encouraged by their families to keep their heritage alive despite the government's efforts to fully assimilate them into Québécois society.

Now that I'm re-learning Japanese, it has been a soul-searching journey for me as I grapple with the current language discourse while attempting to reclaim my roots. After everything I've experienced, I let history and society take control over my identity and belonging in Québec. I was born in Québec, therefore I'm Québécois. I may not speak French perfectly, but I should still be called a Québécois. I lost most of my Japanese, but I'm still Japanese. I have the right to learn my language, I have the right to live in Québec, and I have the right to be my authentic self.

Whenever I fall into another identity crisis, I always tell myself: "*Watashi no namae wa, Toguri Tokimi desu.*"

# STORY-TELLING AS A MEANS TO RECOGNIZE AND RESIST OUR INJUSTICES

By Aurora Tsai

---

I was born and raised in the U.S., identify ethnically as Taiwanese (Hakka) and mixed-European, but due to my family's migration from Taiwan to the U.S. and Japan, I identify culturally as American and Japanese. Due to my strong desire to communicate and form stronger ties with my family, I worked hard to learn Japanese, mainly as an adult, taking courses in college, studying abroad, working in Japan as an English teacher, and using Japanese in my everyday life in Hawaii while pursuing an M.A. in second language studies. When I returned to the mainland U.S. for my Ph.D., however, I was immediately reminded of my Otherness, a feeling I had long forgotten while living in Hawaii.

At the welcome orientation, the first professor I met asked me, "What is your language?" as if I was not a native speaker of English. The following week, at an informal party, another professor and senior student started asking me about my "strange" accent, insisting that I must have grown up partially in Japan. A few weeks later, at the graduate student dinner, questions about my cultural identity came up again. I don't remember what I said or did, but it must have been a "Japanese" behavior because one graduate student's wife asked loudly in front of everyone, "Aurora, why are you so Japanese?!" I felt people's gazes shift towards me. A "monoracial" Japanese international student sitting near me piped in, "Yah. Why are you so Japanese?"

This time, however, I was frustrated and angry. First, because I am Japanese—but her asking this question made me feel like I didn't have the right to be. Second, because she knew I had Japanese relatives and had lived in Japan prior to this—why was she so surprised? Third, and perhaps most upsetting, because she used a tone of voice that made it sound like acting Japanese was some type of character flaw. I was frustrated and tired of comments invalidating my racial, linguistic and cultural identities.

"What do you mean? I'm just Aurora." I replied in an offended tone. Fortunately, the husband seemed to recognize my anger and quietly reproached his wife. The Japanese graduate student also apologized, "Sorry, yes. You are Aurora", he stated in a soft, guilty voice.

...

In my youth and early adulthood, I often blamed myself for the comments I received about my language and cultural behaviors, especially when it came from people in higher positions of power. I felt like a constant racial, linguistic, and cultural imposter, as I did not fit anyone's imagined categories of race or language.

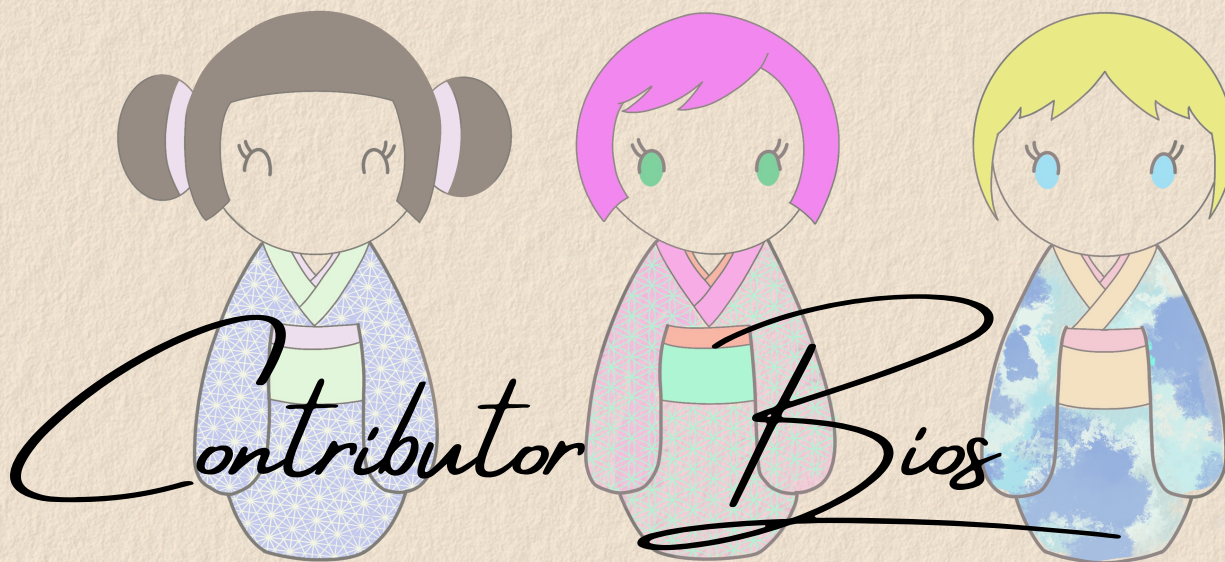
However, scholars in applied linguistics have started to challenge the ways society tends to conflate ideas of race and language. In a ground-breaking article, Rosa and Flores (2017) introduced the concept of raciolinguistic ideologies, documenting the ways nonWhite races and languages have been correlated and hierarchically designated as inferior since the beginning of Western colonization. For example, raciolinguistic ideologies are at play when people assume Asians cannot speak English or unconsciously assume their English is "deviant" even when they are speaking the "proper" form. Raciolinguistic ideologies have shaped society's beliefs that the English used by other racialized groups (namely Black and Indigineous Americans) are "improper" or "uneducated," despite the widely acknowledged fact that there is no objectively superior form of English (Lippi-Green, 2012). Pertinent to JFN members, raciolinguistic ideologies also tend to portray heritage language learners (such as Nikkei learning Japanese) as linguistically "deficient" if they cannot speak their mother tongues to a "native-like" level, despite being raised in a country where it is not their dominant language. This happens because dominant ideologies in our society, stemming from colonization, have taught people to make assumptions about one's language abilities based on their racial appearance.

Although our experiences with racial and linguistic "Othering" or microaggressions may seem harmless on the surface, their cumulative effects can be highly damaging. Social psychologists widely acknowledge that racial microaggressions can take a significant toll on the mental well-being of minorities and have been associated with increased risk for psychological distress, suicidal ideation, anxiety, and clinical depression (Nadal et al. 2014, 2015; Hwang & Goto, 2008; Torres et al., 2010; Wong-Padoongpatt et al., 2017). Perhaps because overt racism is easier to identify and recognize as wrong, some scholars even argue that everyday subtle, ambiguous insults can be more damaging to one's mental health than blatant forms of racism (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

Research like this has helped awaken me and other activist researchers to the need to stop the cycle of internalized shame that is taught to us by colonial ideologies of linguistic purism and white supremacy. Through venues such as JFN's *Nikkei Monogatari*, I hope that we (members of the Japanese diaspora) can share our stories as a means for community healing (French et al., 2020). According to French et al., an integral part of community healing involves storytelling, as it helps marginalized groups form a collective history, develop a critical consciousness, and recognize injustices due to systemic oppression. Without this opportunity, we have few chances to rewrite dominant narratives of racial and linguistic "deficiency" to our own narratives, celebrating our multicultural and multilingual skillsets.

## References

- French, B. H., Lewis, J. A., Mosley, D. V., Adames, H. Y., Chavez-Dueñas, N. Y., Chen, G. A., & Neville, H. A. (2020). Toward a Psychological Framework of Radical Healing in Communities of Color. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 48(1), 14–46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000019843506>
- Hwang, W.-C., & Goto, S. (2008). The impact of perceived racial discrimination on the mental health of Asian American and Latino college students. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 14(4), 326–335. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1099-9809.14.4.326>
- Lippi-Green, R. (2012). *English with an accent: Language, ideology and discrimination in the United States* (2nd ed). Routledge.
- Nadal, K. L., Griffin, K. E., Wong, Y., Hamit, S., & Rasmus, M. (2014). The Impact of Racial Microaggressions on Mental Health: Counseling Implications for Clients of Color. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 92(1), 57–66. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2014.00130.x>
- Nadal, K. L., Wong, Y., Sriken, J., Griffin, K., & Fujii-Doe, W. (2015). Racial microaggressions and Asian Americans: An exploratory study on within-group differences and mental health. *Asian American Journal of Psychology*, 6(2), 136–144. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038058>
- Rosa, J., & Flores, N. (2017). Unsettling race and language: Toward a raciolinguistic perspective. *Language in Society*, 46(5), 621–647.
- Solorzano, D., Ceja, M., & Yosso, T. (2001). Critical Race Theory, Racial Microaggressions, and Campus Racial Climate: The Experiences of African American College Students. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 69(1/2), 60–73.
- Torres, L., Driscoll, M. W., & Burrow, A. L. (2010). Racial Microaggressions and Psychological Functioning Among Highly Achieving African-Americans: A Mixed-Methods Approach. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 29(10), 1074–1099. <https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.2010.29.10.1074>
- Wong-Padoongpatt, G., Zane, N., Okazaki, S., & Saw, A. (2017). Decreases in implicit self-esteem explain the racial impact of microaggressions among Asian Americans. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 64(5), 574–583. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000217>

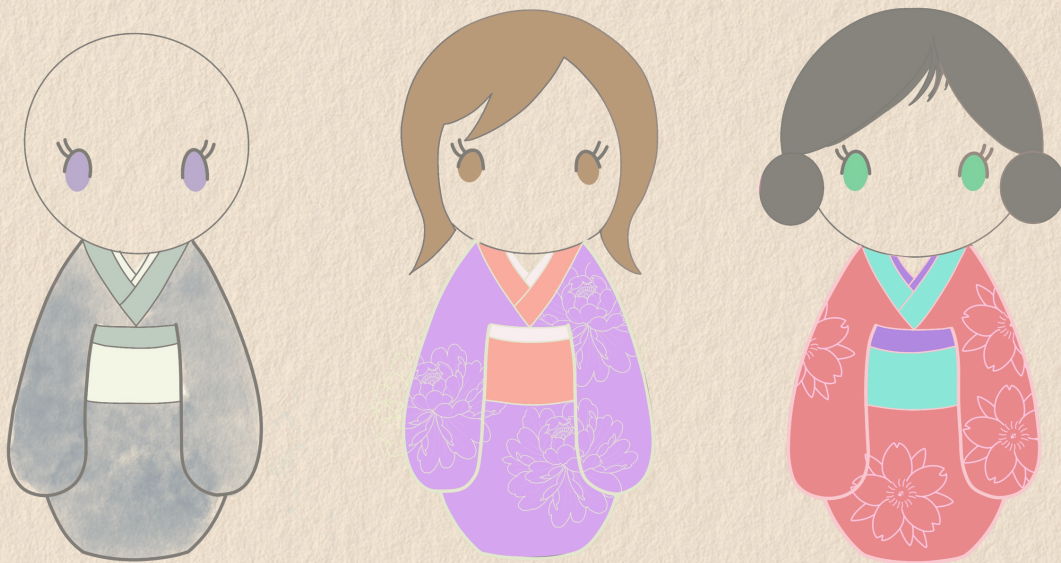


**Eléonore Komai** (she/her) is a Belgian x Japanese researcher and writer currently living in Tiohti:áke/Montréal, Canada. Her research focuses on immigration politics and policy from a comparative perspective. She uses creative writing as a lens to un/re/dis/cover emotions, images, and sensations, and to simultaneously explore issues of identity, self-awareness, and gratitude. Follow her @iamelekomai

**Noemi Takebayashi Caballero** I'm half Japanese half Mexican, and I'm currently studying engineering in biotechnology. I would have loved to see media representations of hāfús when growing up. Sometimes I feel rootless with no sense of full belonging to either country, but I love both of my cultures, and I'm proud of my heritage.

**Alexa Toguri-Laurin** (she/her) is a half Japanese neurodivergent student based in the multicultural city of Tiohti:áke/Montréal, Canada. She enjoys shopping, spending time with friends, scrolling through social media and annoying her siblings. She currently studies journalism at Concordia University and contributes to the school's award-winning student-run newspaper, *The Link*. You can find her on Instagram (@alexalaurin) and Twitter (@alexatoguri).

**Dr. Aurora Tsai** grew up in Ohio and Maryland. She received her M.A. in Second Language Studies at the University of Hawaii at Mānoa and her Ph.D. in Second Language Acquisition at Carnegie Mellon University. Her research currently focuses on the intersections of race, language, and identity and their applications towards language education and policy. In her most recent project, she looks at how raciolinguistic ideologies equating race and language influence the identity development of mixed race and mixed heritage individuals.



## COVER ART

**PJ Patten** is a writer, artist, tattooer and poet of half-Japanese descent. His first graphic novel, *Tower 25*, was published in 2020. He is currently working on a graphic novel adaptation of a play based on the interviews of those Japanese Canadians who spent time in the Tashme internment camps. [INSTAGRAM.COM/MR.PJPATTEN](https://www.instagram.com/mr.pjpatten)

## ABOUT THE CO-FOUNDERS

**Sachi Kikuchi** grew up in a biracial, bilingual, and bicultural household in Canada. After completing her MA in Theoretical Linguistics and a TESL certificate, she moved to Sendai, Miyagi. Four years later, Sachi returned to Canada, where she founded Kokoro Communications, which provides translation as well as Japanese and English language education, and then co-founded Japanese for Nikkei with her childhood friend, Mimi.

**Mimi Okabe** was born in Miyagi, Japan but immigrated to Canada with her family when she was 11 months old. She grew up in a bicultural environment, but the racism she endured as a child made her want to run away from her Japanese heritage. Her research interests in Nikkei identity and culture were inspired by having taught Japanese at the University of Alberta and through the confounding of Japanese for Nikkei with her *osanana-jimi* (childhood friend), Sachi! Mimi is now a clinical assistant professor at the University at Buffalo in the Asian Studies Program.



つづく

To be continued...

“

*Even though it can be hard, I always fight to hold on to the things that make me happy about language learning and maintenance.*

--Sachi Kikuchi

“

*I felt like a constant racial, linguistic, and cultural imposter, as I did not fit anyone's imagined categories of race or language.*

--Aurora Tsai



# NIKKEI MONOGATARI

日系物語

