

# The Identity Perception among Young Japanese Brazilians Living in Japan:

## A Case Study about Learners of Portuguese as Heritage Language

Daniel SERRANO

(Teacher Training Student – Nara University of Education)

SHIBUYA Maki

(Department of School Education– Nara University of Education)

### Abstract

The study analyzes the profile of four young Japanese Brazilian students enrolled in a volunteer initiative for teaching Portuguese as heritage language in Sakai, Osaka prefecture. The children of Brazilian *dekasegi*, who came to Japan during the 1990s to work in the industrial sector, were born and raised in Japan and live in an area with low concentration of Brazilian citizens. By presenting and interpreting their identity narratives, the investigation aims to understand how identification process and perception take place within these individuals, whose usage rate and proficiency in Portuguese language are variable. The results suggest that factors such as parents' level of acculturation and the relationship with siblings and other family members have an important impact on children's sense of belonging. Research findings also indicate that this second generation of immigrants places a higher value on schooling and education, frequently included in their plans for the future, and reveals an internationalist inclination characteristic of a culturally hybrid profile.

**Key Words:** Identity, Heritage Language,  
Brazilian *Nikkeijin*

### 1. Introduction

At the beginning of the 1990s, attracted by more welcoming policies implemented by the Japanese government, large groups of Brazilian immigrants came to Japan to work as *dekasegi*. Most of them were people of Japanese descent, the *nikkeijin* – children and grandchildren of Japanese immigrants who decades earlier had made their way to South America. Part of the so-called “newcomers” group, these *dekasegi* settled initially in industrial areas with broader offer of jobs, such as some cities in Aichi, Shizuoka, Mie, Gunma and Gifu prefectures – commonly referred as “diversity points”<sup>(1)</sup> due to a higher concentration of foreigners.

The mixed roots of this group of people, who in spite of their Japanese origins had been raised in Brazil, challenged the common-sense associated with the concept of identity, frequently depicted as something monolithic

and with well-defined boundaries. The common ancestry, that many thought would help *nikkeijin* integrate into Japanese society, in some cases ended up adding new layers of complexity to the process of identity construction. Most of these immigrants had come alone, with plans of staying for not more than a couple of years. However, temporary stays became indefinite as some of them, finding a partner in Japan, started a family and, later, had children. This new generation of *nikkeijin*, born to Brazilian parents in Japan, has imposed new challenges to the comprehension of this immigration phenomenon. Many of these young people, raised in Japan, have Portuguese as heritage language and nourish ambiguous feelings regarding Brazilian culture.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the reality experienced by these young people, children of Brazilian *dekasegi* living in Japan, with special focus on the perceptions they have about their own identities.

Based on the fact that “schools with small concentrations of non-Japanese are, statistically, the rule rather than the exception”<sup>(2)</sup>, and, consequently, that being a foreigner out of a diversity point configures a more representative situation of the challenges faced by foreigners in Japan, we chose to analyze the cases of people living in Sakai, Osaka prefecture, where the concentration of Brazilian immigrants is not particularly high.

In such places, children face challenges that require support not only from the school, that is, formal education, but also from the community, through the work of volunteer groups – which play an important role in helping children developing their sense of belonging and, as a consequence, dealing better with their studies and everyday life. Because of that, we have focused our investigation on the cases of four young people – between sixteen and eighteen years old – who take part in a volunteer group, located in Sakai, which offers weekly classes of Portuguese as heritage language. The project exists since 2008 and attracts regularly between five and fifteen students every Friday night.

## 2. Methodology

Fieldwork was conducted during a period of almost half a year, from April 27<sup>th</sup> to October 5<sup>th</sup> of 2018. The first author visited classes approximately twice a month, in a total of twelve opportunities.

Since the beginning, the intention was to select, among the children who attend the project, a few students whose examples could be analyzed in detail – following a case study method inspired by works by Linger (2001)<sup>(3)</sup>, Roth (2002)<sup>(4)</sup>, Shimizu (2011)<sup>(5)</sup>, Yamamoto (2013)<sup>(6)</sup> and Moloney & Oguro (2015)<sup>(7)</sup>.

The first step was preparing a written questionnaire to be answered by the students, containing inquiries about their relation with the language, involvement with the project and identity perception.

Out of the five students who answered the questionnaire, we selected initially three cases: Ayaka, Richard and Hiroshi.<sup>(8)</sup> The reason was that, apart from being in the same age range and having been participating in the project for an equivalent period, these three students presented different levels of language proficiency, which seemed also (the questionnaire suggested) to reflect in different degrees of identification with Brazilian culture. Also, they were assiduous students with whom we had, and would have, the opportunity to

interact more frequently.

Later, however, afraid that the selection based on this *continuum* of language proficiency level and identification degree might result in a very schematic *corpus* (suggesting, for instance, a direct relation between proficiency and identification that could be a misinterpretation of reality), we decided to include, as a kind of counterexample, the case of Gabriel, a student that, in spite of the difficulties with Portuguese language, showed a strong sense of Brazilianness. His attendance was also irregular, eventual – again, a fact that contrasted with the reality of the three students previously selected. Somehow, this last example was meant to question, to put in perspective any excessive “regularity” suggested by the three previous cases.

At the time of the interview, the four students whose cases are analyzed in this paper were between sixteen and eighteen years old and were enrolled in Japanese high schools. All of them have been participating in the project for more than six years. They were either born in Japan or moved to Japan while still very young. Their parents are all *dekasegi* who came to Japan to work in the industrial sector. Apart from Ayaka, whose non-*nikkeijin* mother married to a Japanese husband, children are all born to *nikkei* Brazilian parents, who came to Japan as singles and started a family in the country. All of them have, thus, Japanese origins.

The next step was interviewing students and one of their parents, usually the one with closer connection to the project. Contact was made through the educator responsible for the group, who was also interviewed. Conducted between October 5<sup>th</sup> and December 1<sup>st</sup> of 2018, the semi-structured interviews were divided into three main parts: family background, relation to the project and the language, and identity perception.

Thus, the data collected during the interviews and almost six months of fieldwork and the information obtained through written questionnaires have formed the basis of the four case studies presented in this paper. Adopting a qualitative perspective, thought as more appropriate for studies with identity approaches<sup>(9)</sup>, we are aware of the fact that much of our subjectivity is to be noticed in the way participants’ identity narratives are analyzed and interpreted. Recognizing this unavoidable bias, which should not be mistaken as lack of rigor, is one of our duties as researchers.

### 3. Overview of the project

The volunteer group object of our investigation was founded in 2008. Conducted currently by a *nikkei* Brazilian educator who lives in Japan since 1996, the project aims to strengthen identity bonds among children of Brazilian *dekasegi* by improving their knowledge of Portuguese – which is, for the majority of them, a heritage language.

Meetings are held every Friday, from 6:15 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. A Portuguese lesson is held in the first part of the meetings for five to fifteen students. Age ranges from children currently in junior high school to university students. All of them have Brazilian roots, and either were born in Japan or moved to the country during early childhood. After the Portuguese lesson, a Japanese volunteer couple offers support for eventual difficulties experienced by the students at school.

Classes are conducted in a non-orthodox format. The meetings consist usually of preparation for long-term projects – for instance, a theater play about the history of immigration between Brazil and Japan – or alternative activities based on students' interests and demands.

## 4. Case studies

### 4. 1. The case of Ayaka

Sixteen-years-old Ayaka, born in Japan, lives currently with her parents – a non-*nikkei* Brazilian mother and a Japanese father – and a younger sister, Miki. At the time of the interview, she was a second-year student in a business high school in Osaka.

Ayaka is one of the most assiduous students taking part in the project. During classes, she is usually very quiet, though attentive, and shows great commitment to the project. During preparations for a theater presentation, for example, she played an important role in translating excerpts of the script to Japanese and, later, volunteering to be one of the presenters. Her sense of responsibility strikes as surprising when we take into consideration her proficiency in Portuguese – in fact, among all the students we have observed, she is the one with the most difficulty. Rarely does she speak Portuguese. Even when addressed in this language, she tends to answer in Japanese.

### 4. 1. 1. Identity perception

#### *The comparison with Miki*

During the presentation of the theater play about immigration between Brazil and Japan, there was a moment reserved for students' messages or testimonies. In a brief participation, Miki, Ayaka's younger sister, spoke about discrimination. Standing side by side with her mother, who read a Portuguese translation, the girl recalled episodes of intolerance which took place during early school time.

Complaints about intolerance are frequent in Miki's discourse. During elementary school, her mother recalls the episode of a boy who would insist on calling Miki, in a pejorative tone, "gaijin" (foreigner). As for Ayaka, the mother affirms not having heard any complaints whatsoever. "If there was any episode, she never told me", suggests the mother. The girl herself, when asked about the matter, did not mention any major troubles with adaptation to school life.

#### *Plans for the future*

During the theater play in which her sister spoke about intolerance, Ayaka chose rather to present her plans for the future: "My name is Ayaka. I am 16 years old. I have three dreams. The first one is to go to university. The second one is to work as a public servant in the city hall. The third one is to teach Japanese for Brazilian children".

She intends also to study Portuguese in a university of foreign studies. Although her mother still hesitates about this option, Ayaka seems to be sure of her next steps. The mother points out that Ayaka has a strong personality and tends not to downgrade her high motive. In fact, the girl seems to have a clear view about her future goals in life. When asked about being someone who "likes studying", however, she denies being this type of person. Her mother says that what moves Ayaka is less a taste for studying than a strong sense of planning.

It is interesting to notice a small contradiction in those discourses about future studies. If Ayaka was as pragmatic towards the future as her mother suggests, we would expect her to maintain her old plans of studying English – an option that would certainly represent a more valuable passport for future professional opportunities. This was not the option, though. Ayaka chose to study Portuguese, even if *studying* is not really what she likes best. There seems to be, thus, a hidden motivation behind this option. When asked about that during the

interview, Ayaka said that one of the reasons that led her to this option was a will to “learn languages from other countries”. Portuguese, then, was chosen because it seemed to her the most accessible one.

#### *Views of identity*

Both Ayaka and her mother were asked to comment on their identity perception. Her mother admits it is a difficult topic to think about. Not without hesitation, she says that Ayaka should perhaps be considered half Brazilian, half Japanese. However, she is aware that this is not the same impression the daughter herself has.

When replying the initial questionnaire, Ayaka wrote that she considered herself Japanese for two main reasons. The first one was that, according to her, when she sees a foreigner (“gaikokujin”), she feels there is something different between this person and herself. This difference, based mainly on outer appearance, leads her to think that she does not belong to this “foreigner” category – feeling, thus, more Japanese.

A second reason had to do with her not having a very “Brazilian personality”. Asked about that during the interview, she explained that Brazilian people tended to be more cheerful (“akarui”) and free (“jiyū”), while Japanese would be classified as gloomy (“kurai”).

Her attempts to position herself seem to be based on denial: she thinks about herself as Japanese because she is *not* a foreigner, and also because she does *not* have a “Brazilian” personality. Therefore, she might think, “Japanese” is a category left. In fact, this *other*, opposed to one’s *self*, usually plays an important role in identification process. If identities are situational, depending on context<sup>(10)</sup>, people will always tend to define themselves by some kind of opposition. In other words, identity is a matter of differentiating ourselves from the others. That seems to be the case for Ayaka, who, more than affirming her own “Japaneseness”, points out to a “non-Japaneseness” which she sees as something distant from her.

The girl recalls being called “half” (“hāfu”) in school, provided the fact that she has a Brazilian mother and a Japanese father. When asked if she recognizes herself under this label, she admits introducing herself like this sometimes, even though she sees no big difference between being “half” and being “Japanese”.

She was asked, then, about what would define if a person is Japanese or Brazilian. She answered simply that “it depends on each person”. The answer, however laconic

it may look, contains more information than we imagine. In Ayaka’s definition, there seems to underly a very simple – and maybe even rough – refusal from generalization. In her opinion, it is impossible to present a rule in order to define if someone is *this* or *that*. All cases, thus, should be interpreted individually, not to rashly simplify analysis.

#### 4. 1. 2. Final remarks

Ayaka grew up in an environment that did not foster Portuguese language. Her mother, showing signs of cultural assimilation<sup>(11)</sup>, tended not to value Brazilian identity and gave little importance to preserving the language<sup>(12)</sup> – at least during children’s early years, before their enrollment in the project.

It seems that Ayaka’s getting closer to Portuguese language, through the project, had to do with an attempt to keep alive this Brazilian side of her biography, this ethnic detail which she perceives as not more than that: a “plus” in a lifestyle which is predominantly “Japanese” – at least in the way she perceives this distinction. Ayaka is not in a desperate quest for “Brazilianness”, on the contrary: she reveals being quite aware of the uniqueness of her identity, to the point of fitting her plans of studying Portuguese in a well defined “Japanese” future perspective: going to university and becoming a public servant. More than a strong sense of Brazilianness in Japan, thus, what seems to motivate her is the perspective of acquiring skills that can later serve as professional assets. Portuguese, in this sense, would be the shorter, most natural way to follow.

It is important to notice, however, that if Ayaka’s sense of Brazilianness seems not to be that strong, the same could be said about her sense of Japaneseness. She affirms herself as Japanese, it is true. Yet, while trying to explain the reasons behind this identity perception, Ayaka’s arguments do not sound very convincing. As we saw, she tends to define herself by denying that which she does not identify with. Therefore, she sees herself as Japanese because she is *not* a foreigner and because she does *not* have a “Brazilian personality”. She chooses *what not to be*, rather than *what to be*. We could imagine – and this is of course mere speculation, hypothesis – that she does not feel *that* comfortable with this “Japanese” label. It might be nothing more than a “category” she conveniently adheres to while lacking a better way to express herself. If people identify her as “half”, she is fine with that too. “It is not very different from being Japanese”, she argues.

Another interesting aspect of Ayaka's identity perception is the way she speaks about her sister Miki, who she affirms having a completely different personality. The mother, too, says Miki tends to be more talkative, to interact with many people in school, while the older sister would be more of a quiet person. Ayaka herself states that they are opposites ("gyaku"). She defines her sister as being more cheerful ("akarui") –the same adjective used to describe what would be a "typical Brazilian characteristic". There might be something underlying this statement. Could it be that Ayaka considers her sister to be, say, *more Brazilian* than her? Or, formulating it the other way, that she, Ayaka, thinks about herself as not *Brazilian enough*? Even if those questions do not cross her mind in a conscious way, there is no doubt that daily interaction with her sister, a concrete example of someone who is *different*, plays its role in Ayaka's appreciation of herself.

As we highlighted before, the girl seems to share the impression that each individual is unique, irreducible to a category. Of course this is not formulated by her in such terms, as an abstraction. However, this is what can be read between the lines of her discourse. After all, she shows no special interest for categories – "Japanese" and "half" are more or less the same thing for her – and refuses from presenting a rule that could define whether someone is "Brazilian" or "Japanese". It depends on the person, she thinks. Such kind of perspective, while only briefly suggested by Ayaka's laconic speech, bears certainly a connection with dilemmas she might experience herself. After all, if it is difficult to be assertive about one's own identity, how could one dare to draft general rules for a "disembodied"<sup>(13)</sup> group of people?

What, then, could lay behind Ayaka's wish to study Portuguese at university? Maybe Ayaka is, as the educator in charge of the project suggested during an interview, "dealing with this [identity matters] inside herself". The option for a Portuguese course at university, thus, would represent the opportunity of facing a new challenge, a challenge that will allow her to explore something she herself has failed to identify so far. One of Ayaka's dreams, registered in the questionnaire, is to travel around the world.

While preserving her bonds with Japan – a lifestyle which is the only one she knows so far –, Ayaka seems to be in a quest for something else. Her interest in English, before enrolling in a high school, and in Portuguese, when university perspective approaches, might point to still

unclear wish to become "more international". Her self-appreciation strategy, usually based on the denial of what she sees as different, may be guiding her towards new experiences of difference – a path that would not only enrich her worldview, but also help her to find a more accurate identity for her still oscillating self.

## 4.2. The case of Richard

Sixteen-years-old Richard was born in Brazil and moved to Japan when he was two months old. His parents – both sanseis, that is, grandchildren of Japanese immigrants – live currently in Osaka prefecture along with their two sons: Richard and his seven-years-old brother Robert.

At home, the family communicates usually in Portuguese – except for the young Robert, who tends to answer in Japanese even when addressed in Portuguese. Richard talks mostly Portuguese to the parents, using Japanese words when there is lack of vocabulary, and mostly Japanese to the younger brother. (Until the age of three, Richard spent a lot of time with a Brazilian babysitter who talked Portuguese to him.)

Richard was nine years old when he started attending the project. Nowadays, along with Ayaka, he is one of the most assiduous students among the group.

### 4.2.1. Identity perception

#### *School adaptation*

During his school trajectory, Richard was forced to face new environments and meet new colleagues every time he moved to a different school. According to his mother, there were episodes of bullying ("ijime"), and the boy showed, in early childhood, signs of depressive behavior for "thinking he was different".<sup>(14)</sup>

"I think it was a bit difficult for him to realize he was not Japanese", says his mother. "Once he is here since he was very little, he thinks himself as Japanese. But I told him: 'You are Brazilian even if you are studying here, even if you are living here'. But we were born in Brazil, so we are Brazilian, right?" For her, place of birth seems to be a determinant factor in defining one's identity – the opinion which is not shared by the son, who believes parentage is the main element.

During elementary school, recalls his mother, a teacher helped Richard develop his identity and confidence by approaching the boy and talking to him about common interests. In spite of that, such type of problems continued to be observed after Richard enrolled

in junior high school. “He did not like his own image”, recalls the mother. “On the pictures they took at school, with his colleagues, he would scribble his own face with a pen.”

#### *School and identity expression*

Things would change in the last years of junior high school and, mainly, in high school, where he was, at the time of the interview, a first-year student.

Asked about the way he perceives his own identity, Richard tends to associate his oscillating process of identification with his school trajectory. During the interview, he affirmed, in a half-joking way, feeling himself “80% Brazilian and 20% Japanese”.

He says that this balance has changed throughout his life. “In elementary school I had this foreigner face”, he recalls, suggesting feeling 100% Brazilian at that time. “People would come to me and ask me to say this or that in Portuguese.” In junior high school, according to him, this sense of Brazilianness lost strength, to the point of making him feel more Japanese. In high school, once more the balance changed. When inquired about the reasons behind this oscillation, he said it was because people in his current high school are more open (“aberto”). He continued the explanation in Japanese, reiterating that his new colleagues are open-minded (“sugoi ōpun”). What he tried to explain is that, during junior high school, having classmates who did not handle very well with difference, he tended to be afraid of positioning himself as Brazilian and tried to hide this side of his personality. In high school, on the contrary, where friends deal better with diversity, he was able to reveal his portion of Brazilianness.

The prefectural high school in which he is currently enrolled offers subjects in which topics about diversity and multiculturalism are discussed – something Richard sees as important. There are also “class meetings” in which Richard has the opportunity to share information about Brazilian culture with other students.

#### *Signs of nationality*

When asked about the characteristics of his personality that could be considered as typical of a Brazilian, he mentioned the fact of being able to communicate with many people. Maybe he is trying to affirm himself as someone sociable, a feature he perceives as a sign of Brazilianness. He says that people expect him to be “open” (“aberto”) when they find out he has

Brazilian origins. He, too, sees himself as someone “open”, although some traces of the young, shy, reserved Richard can definitely still be noticed when coming into contact with him.

It might be that his perception of “open” is not necessarily the same of being “talkative” or “extrovert”, but open-hearted. At a point of the interview, he appealed to Japanese to affirm that Brazilian people could also be recognized by their solicitude, their consideration for others (“kikubari”).

#### *The comparison with Robert and plans for the future*

Richard’s mother affirms that he and Robert, his younger brother, have “totally different” personalities. While Richard is calm, the brother would be louder, more lively (“agitado”). Richard says he is more serious (“sério”), while his brother would be a bit selfish (“wagamama”). His mother says that, in spite of some normal “fights” between the brothers, the young Robert shows a strong sense of respect for Richard. Both of them talk about visiting Brazil in the future, but show no disposition to live there.

Richard is not sure yet about what to do after finishing high school. He told us that his dream (“yume”) is to become a professional wrestler, but his plans for the future (“shōrai”) involve working with something related to language. The first one seems to be a vague intention, inspired by his old taste for judo; the second, a more concrete – though not very clear yet – professional goal for the future.

His mother says the son speaks sometimes about going to university abroad for studying English. She admits, though, that he is frequently changing his mind. Sometimes he considers becoming an interpreter in order to help foreigners who come to Japan without knowing the language.

#### **4. 2. 2. Final remarks**

Richard shows confidence when speaking Portuguese. This confidence must have been built, among other factors, due to a family environment that stimulated communication in this language. His mother can be said to have, in comparison with Ayaka’s mother, a more positive approach towards Brazilian culture and identity – something that certainly must have influenced Richard’s identification process. Again comparing with the previous example, it is important to stress that, in Richard’s case,

both parents are Brazilian, a fact that must have naturally created a more Portuguese-friendly environment at home.

That said, it is necessary to highlight that the most influencing element in Richard's identity construction was, with no doubt, school – both regular Japanese institutions he attended since kindergarten and the Portuguese classes in the project. His school trajectory is a clear example of how the learning environment – comprising teachers, classmates, subjects taught, educational perspectives, etc. – can impact student's process of identification. When the atmosphere is welcoming, when the students feel their idiosyncrasies are being respected, they tend to feel more comfortable to explore their multiple identities without fearing external judgment. In Richard's particular case, both individual initiatives, as those of the elementary school teacher who helped him with identity issues, and structured initiatives, as the libertarian curriculum in a high school open for diversity, contributed to his feeling more confident in exploring and expressing his Brazilian side.

The second interesting aspect is something we had already pointed out when presenting Ayaka's case: the connection between identity and the relationship with siblings. A cursory glance would suggest that the relation between Richard and the younger brother Robert mirrors that between Ayaka and her younger sister Miki, with the older sibling tending to be more reserved, quiet, while the younger one is livelier. In this case, though, the distinction between the two brothers seems to be a bit more nuanced. Richard is seen as someone calm, serious, but he also classifies himself as "open" ("aberto") – something he associates with a certain sense of Brazilianness. On the other hand, he affirms having "Japanese" characteristics as honesty ("honesto"), a feature he must imagine, by opposition, be lacking among Brazilians.

His younger brother, however, different from what happened with Miki – who was an example of Brazilianness to her sister Ayaka –, cannot be said to embody a stronger sense of Brazilianness, on the contrary: it is Richard the one who dedicates most to Portuguese language, for example. Besides that, the image of the brother as selfish ("wagamama") would picture him as an opposite to the sense of solicitude ("kikubari") Richard sees as a typical Brazilian feature. The border between one brother and the other and between Brazilianness and Japaneseness is more blurred than in the previous example: Richard might be "more Japanese" in some aspects, for being more "serious", for example; however,

he is also "more Brazilian" than his younger brother inasmuch as, at least in his own perception, he is more open-hearted, more willing to help the others.

The last aspect we would like to highlight, regarding Richard's profile, is his yet diffuse will to work with languages in the future. He insists on attending classes in the project, one of the reasons being an image of Portuguese as stylish ("kakkoi"). The mother mentions vague plans of studying English abroad. Richard himself shows excitement for starting learning Spanish in the second year of high school. It is not difficult to notice that Richard's plans bear some resemblances with Ayaka's. Both of them tend to see Portuguese as the most accessible door to a certain internationalist experiment, that would involve going beyond the borders of Japan or Japaneseness – and, consequently, beyond the borders of the *selves* they know so far. This common perspective, certainly fed by the affective relationship between the two, might be one of the reasons behind their strong commitment to the project.

#### 4. 3. The case of Hiroshi

Eighteen-years-old Hiroshi lives currently in Sakai with his younger sister Talita and his father, Yukio. He started attending the project as an elementary school student – he was around eleven years old. Nowadays, Hiroshi is one of the most active students in the project. He rarely misses classes. Along with Caio – a non-*nikkei* classmate who moved to Japan at the age of ten – Hiroshi is probably one of the students with highest proficiency in Portuguese. During classes, they play an important role as intermediaries between the teacher and students with lower proficiency.

Showing knowledge about Brazil that goes beyond the language, Hiroshi could be considered, if we were to stick up to stereotypes, one of the most "Brazilian" among them. Even his way to behave, to walk, to communicate suggests a relation to a certain image of Brazilian people as more "relaxed" or "easygoing".<sup>(15)</sup>

##### 4. 3. 1. Identity perception

###### *Signs of nationality*

Hiroshi – whose name is officially Eduardo Hiroshi, but is called mostly by the Japanese name<sup>(16)</sup> – claims to feel more Brazilian because of his way to behave ("jeito"). In an interview for a documentary movie<sup>(17)</sup> produced when he was fifteen, Hiroshi defined Brazilian people as being playful ("brincalhão") – a feature he could identify

in his own personality. “I’m glad I was born playful too”, he said then.

He tends to associate “Japaneseness” with a certain degree of discipline and inflexibility. When speaking about school, he affirms being contrary to their “way of thinking” – strict rules related to hair style, dress code, etc. “I don’t think it is right. It’s a matter of personality”, he says. “For example, I like to wear caps, but they say it is ugly. I don’t care if it is ugly or beautiful.” Hiroshi perceives his school – a public technical high school in Sakai – as particularly strict, when compared to others.

On the other hand, he does not hesitate recognizing that he himself has also some Japanese characteristics. He affirms being shy and quiet (“shizuka”) – a definition that might contrast with the perception other people have of him. Besides that, he shows preoccupation with the usage of polite speech (“keigo”) when talking to people in Japanese. He sees it as complicated and admits feeling uncomfortable in contexts where such kind of language is required.

When asked about the importance of identity issues in his everyday life, Hiroshi at first affirms not thinking much about it. Would it mean, then, that self-defining is not a matter of great importance? He answers: “*For the time being* I am both [Japanese and Brazilian]”. Some instants later, he reformulates: “More *Brazilian-like* than Japanese”. And, finally, sounding more assertive: “I think myself as more Brazilian”.

It is particularly interesting, in this sequence, to notice how Hiroshi’s word choice adds extra layers of meaning to his attempt of self-interpretation. At the beginning, Hiroshi says that “for the time being” (“por enquanto”) he feels both Brazilian and Japanese. The term he employed suggests that this dual state is perceived by him as something temporary, momentaneous, subject to change – exactly how contemporary cultural studies usually define identity. After that, Hiroshi changes slightly his way of thinking and says that he is more “Brazilian-like” (“abrasileirado”). He does not use, at first, the most common word “brasileiro”, but “abrasileirado”, a term that could be translated as “Brazilianized”, that is, “made Brazilian”.

When asked about what would define whether someone is Japanese or Brazilian, he suggests that, for him, it is not possible to think about a rule, a pattern (“padrão”) – an answer similar to that Ayaka gave to the same question. He was asked, then, whether he thought that speaking Portuguese better than the other

students in the project would make him “more Brazilian”. “Never thought about it, huh?”, he answered, quite spontaneously, after hesitating for some seconds. “I don’t think so. More than communication, it depends on the way you act, the way you think”, he explained.

#### *Identity conscience*

In the high school he was attending at the time of the interview, there were very few foreigners. He mentioned only Caio – his junior – and a Peruvian colleague. Hiroshi says that he even considered forming a group composed only of school’s foreigners (he used both the Japanese word “gaikokujin” and the Portuguese term “estrangeiro”). According to him, however, it is a bit difficult to gather students for this purpose. “Most of foreigners there do not even know they are foreigners”, he explains, suggesting a lack of identity conscience. “They think they are Japanese.” This attitude, which he recognizes as problematic, would reflect also in their language choices. “They do not speak the language”, he says, referring to their heritage language, their language of origin. “I wish there was someone who liked his own country, you know?”.

It seems, indeed, that Hiroshi would like to have more opportunities to talk about Brazil in school context, something that rarely happens. Judging by his own impressions, the school, apparently strict and not very open to students’ participation, would leave him without any opportunity to debate such kind of issues.

Born in Hamamatsu, the most “Brazilian” city in Japan, Hiroshi regrets the fact that there are not many Brazilian people living in Osaka prefecture. His opportunities for speaking Portuguese, thus, end up restricted to the project or to the household. Hiroshi admits missing a certain Brazilian way (“jeito”), which he defines as being funny (“engraçado”). He even thinks that, when among Brazilian, he acts more relaxed.

#### *Future plans*

After graduation, Hiroshi is considering going to the university for studying English. Once his father has a friend who lives in Canada, the possibility of studying there has grown as an attractive option. At the moment, they are still investigating the possibilities and considering if it would be affordable. Plans, though not clear yet, involve studying English and, maybe, Spanish.

Different from Ayaka and Richard, however, whose plans seemed, if not fully decided, at least strong, a bit



more concrete, neither Hiroshi or his father showed great enthusiasm or assertiveness while presenting their plans. At the time they were interviewed, Hiroshi was taking his driver's license. Talking about that, his father suggested that Hiroshi might want to buy himself a car, a decision that would force him to drop the part-time job and look for a more stable one, with a higher wage. In this case, plans of going to the university could be postponed, or even abandoned.

The "car issue" might sound a little trivial at this point of the analysis, but the fact is that the shared taste for cars is a strong connection element between Hiroshi and his father. When the son finally got his license, Yukio, the father, posted on social media a video showing their first ride together.

More than only an affective lace, though, this shared taste apparently symbolizes a certain life perspective that, noticeable in Yukio's hard-working profile and in his wish to have a "comfortable" life, seems to affect also Hiroshi's own lifestyle. In the written questionnaire, asked about his plans for the future, Hiroshi did not even mention the possibility of studying English. Instead, he wrote simply: "I don't know, but I want to earn money". The educator in charge of the project recalls an activity, in the beginning of his participation in the group, in which students were asked to highlight important things for them by selecting some images. The young Hiroshi, in that opportunity, chose images of expensive cars, sumptuous houses, money bills, among others. A sign, maybe, that his future plans might be also influenced by this more materialist way to look at things.

#### 4.3.2. Final remarks

Hiroshi's life story bears, if we look to his early years, some resemblances with that of Ayaka. Like her, Hiroshi was born in Japan, lived in Brazil for a short period while still very young and is said to have communicated mostly in Japanese during elementary school. The similarities, however, stop there. Their following trajectories are significantly different. While Ayaka did not have much opportunity to develop her Portuguese proficiency, Hiroshi grew up to be a very skilled speaker of his heritage language. While Ayaka tends to identify mostly with Japanese values, Hiroshi would certainly be placed in the Brazilian side of this identity *continuum*.

Many are the reasons that might have influenced this differentiation. Firstly, the fact that Hiroshi's parents are both Brazilian, the two of them with limited proficiency

in Japanese language. Secondly, the fact that his father, at first settled in Hamamatsu, where Brazilian community is more expressive, shows a more affirmatively Brazilian profile – an attitude that must certainly have influenced the children. Third, the larger offer of Brazilian cultural artifacts Hiroshi was exposed to throughout his upbringing. The role of technology, in his case, should also be highlighted. Through the Internet, Hiroshi gained access to a variety of language input – videos, songs, news – that went much beyond that of conversations within his household.

With Ayaka and Richard, Hiroshi shares a certain internationalist inclination, noticeable not only in his taste for languages or uncertain plans of studying abroad, but also in his relationship with a Bolivian godfather and Peruvian classmates. In a certain sense, practicing Portuguese represents, for Hiroshi, a possibility to expand his range of communication, moving beyond the borders of Japaneseness or Brazilianness.

On the other hand, it seems that the relationship with siblings, which played an important role in Ayaka's and Richard's identity construction, has a minor importance in Hiroshi's case. He and his sister Talita, according to the father, have similar personalities and show equivalent language proficiency. Maybe because of that, Hiroshi does not seem to use her as an element of contrast when speculating about his own identity. We should also take into account that, in this example, we are dealing with siblings of different genders, a detail that might discourage deeper comparisons.

Rather than his sister, it seems to be the father who Hiroshi takes as a model or reference for building his own identity. Yukio shows a very clear positioning about what he understands as "Brazilianness" and what he expects from his children. Although his tone is calm and courteous, his formulations might sound somewhat commanding, leading us to speculate how much they might have influenced Hiroshi's own identity perceptions. Some of the things the son values – praise of wealth, interest for cars – are clearly inspired by his father. Sometimes, he seems also to reproduce Yukio's discourse – for instance, when both show the same opinion about the disadvantages of studying English in Japan.

This paternal influence, as we see it, is reflected in two conflicting desires: on the one hand, Hiroshi contemplates university and languages as a path that might, in the future, lead him to a lifestyle that, being comfortable and successful, can also be more prestigious

than that of his parents, employed in the industrial sector. On the other hand, more immediate aspirations, related to the acquisition of material goods, risk deviating him from the study path and precipitating an early entrance into the job market.

In terms of identity, we recognize two main paths through which Hiroshi builds his own appreciation of himself. The first one is affirmation of identity through differences. There seems to be, in his life trajectory, a turning point – somewhere between the end of elementary school and beginning of junior high school – which made him take pride of his Brazilian origins and accept Portuguese as a language which also belongs to him. His father recalls that his group of Brazilian friends, at a certain time, started to use mostly Portuguese to communicate. Hiroshi, in turn, who in the past was embarrassed of using the language in public, found in his Brazilian and Peruvian colleagues at school an evidence that “people like him” existed. This “deforeignization” involved, in his case, a movement towards becoming *aware*, becoming *conscious* of difference – unlike some other foreign students at school, who allegedly “think they are Japanese”. Affirming his difference, thus, was one of the ways that the adolescent Hiroshi found to express his singularity.

The second path, complementary rather than conflicting, is a certain appreciation of *informality*, expressed in his desire to learn Brazilian slangs, in a questioning approach of school’s rules and in a wary attitude towards polite speech, which he sees as an emblem of Japanese lack of flexibility – not only because Portuguese indeed does not value formality as much as Japanese language, but also because the contexts in which he usually uses Portuguese are all “relaxed” contexts: communicating with the family, talking to friends from the project, watching videos on the Internet. This taste for informality seems to be related also with Hiroshi’s notion of “jeito”, a certain “way” through which Brazilianness would be expressed. The concept, difficult to be defined or explained, is mostly *felt* by Hiroshi. While trying to put into words what he means by this “jeito”, he oscillates between reinforcing some common stereotypes, as the one of a Japanese “discipline” or a Brazilian “playfulness”, and adopting a more nuanced perspective, by pointing to the impossibility of thinking about “patterns” for identity. While doing so, he reveals a very contemporary way to look at identity construction, stressing its fluid and temporary nature.

#### 4. 4. The case of Gabriel

Seventeen-years-old Gabriel, born in Japan, lives currently in Sakai along with an older brother, Daisuke, and his *nissei* parents. He started attending the project in the final years of elementary school, by determination of his mother, Márcia. Her motivations had less to do with language than with a certain will to enhance Gabriel’s social and communicative skills. She says the son always tended to be “isolated” (“isolado”) – not exactly shy (“tímido”) or introvert (“introvertido”), but someone who showed troubles to communicate with people and work in group. Gabriel, who was a boy of few friends during school time, is described by her as being very reserved (“bem fechado”) – characteristics she sees in herself too. “I thought: this boy will end up being like me”, she recalls. “He will be isolated. And I don’t want it for him. It’s not good. Because I isolated myself. I’ve been isolated for a long time in Japan.”

Nowadays, Gabriel is not among the most assiduous students in the group. Different from our previous examples – Ayaka, Richard and Hiroshi –, he is frequently absent or late for classes. During the activities, he is sometimes sleepy, absentminded or distracted looking at the cell phone. More than once, he showed up only after classes, in order to meet with other students while dinner was being served.

##### 4. 4. 1. Identity perception

###### *Signs of nationality and self perception*

In the written questionnaire, Gabriel informed that people usually mistake him for a “half” (“yoku hāfu to machigaerareru”) – a category he does not identify with.<sup>(18)</sup> Asked about that during the interview, he affirmed thinking about himself as something else (“chigau to omotte iru”), since both his father and mother, in spite of the Japanese roots, are Brazilian. Rather than a “half”, he said, he sees himself as a Brazilian *nikkei* (“nikkei burajiruijin”).

Also in the questionnaire, he affirmed considering himself Brazilian because everyone in his family has “Brazilian blood” (“burajiru no chi”). During the interview, he presented a more nuanced perspective. “My mom has Japanese blood too”, he pondered, suggesting that the definition might be more complicated than he imagined.

Although speaking about Brazilian people as more friendly (“furendori”) and affirming that interaction with them is easier because the shared background creates

a sense of reciprocity (“*taiou*”), Gabriel admits having some characteristics that could be considered more “Japanese”. Especially with regard to human relations (“*ningenkankei*”), he considers himself a little reserved (“*hikaeme*”). Regarding other aspects, however, he would feel less identified with Japanese culture. As an example of that, he mentions a certain sense of hierarchy (“*jōgekankei*”) which he sees as exaggerated.

One of the reasons for regarding hierarchical relationships with reserve might be the image he has of himself as someone adventurous, with a taste for challenges (“*bōken*”). According to him, this was a feature that helped him adapting to school in his early years as a student. Later, the same wish to experience new things would influence the choice to study computer science in high school and the decision of looking for a part-time job. Nowadays, his adventurous side would be stimulating his recent interest for cocktails, as well as his yet uncertain plans of working as a model.

#### *Influence of the mother*

“Even though he was born here in Japan, I want him to have a Brazilian heart”, says Gabriel’s mother. “I want him to feel Brazilian. Not Japanese. I want him to feel Brazilian. Because the fact is that they are not Japanese. That’s what I tell them.”

The incisive discourse of the mother bears a contradiction in terms of identity perception. When talking about herself, Márcia highlights that fact that, in spite of the Japanese origins, she has a “Brazilian heart” because Brazil is “the country where she was born”. However, birthplace, which in her case is perceived as the most important element of identification, is regarded as not that important when talking about her children, of whom she speaks as Brazilian “even though they were born in Japan”. The contradiction, which reflects in Márcia’s distinct expectations for herself and for her children, is justified by her as a matter deriving from the fact that they belong to “different generations”, raised in different contexts.

She believes that solidarity (“*solidários*”) and human warmth (“*calorosos*”) are some of the characteristics of Brazilian people, who would also show a stronger sense of intimacy (“*intimidade*”). These are the features Márcia affirms identifiable also in Gabriel, and they are the reasons why she thinks he should be considered Brazilian. Márcia affirms also that Gabriel “doesn’t think as a Japanese”, that is, he does not have a “Japanese way

of thinking” – which she characterizes as an inflexible attitude of always following a certain type of protocol (“*junban*”). In her opinion, Gabriel would have a more flexible profile, illustrated, for example, by his recent desire to leave the current part-time job and start working in a bar.

#### *Study life and plans for the future*

At the time of the interview, Gabriel was a third-year student in a vocational school in Osaka. Although he often complains about the school, the mother expects him at least to graduate from it. She argues that if the son decided to drop studies he would have troubles finding a good job in the future. It becomes clear in her discourse that she does not want him to follow the same path she followed: the industrial sector, where most of Brazilian *nikkeijin* were employed.

In this sense, she welcomes his recent interest in cocktails and his plans of looking for a job in a bar as an opportunity for him to finally discover something he likes doing. Since he is expected to graduate soon, Márcia seems to demand him to decide his future. Gabriel, however, speaks about his next steps with much uncertainty, mentioning not only his interest for cocktails, but also the possibility of working as a model.

#### **4. 4. 2. Final remarks**

The relation Gabriel maintains with the project is quite different from that of the other three students. While the Ayaka, Richard and Hiroshi form a group of assiduous and attentive students, Gabriel is frequently absent or late and hardly ever engages in activities with the same interest as the others. Also, he is the only one, among this group of four, who does not mention any concrete plans of studying languages or any special wish to develop a more “internationalist” profile, as we had seen in the previous cases.

Such lack of interest for classes or language, however, might not necessarily point to a failure in his trajectory inside the project. The fact that his absence in the project is sometimes motivated by his wish to stay longer with his friends from high school could be read, rather than a sign of failure, as a sign of progress, if we take into account the fact that young Gabriel was, in the past, a child who had troubles with social interaction. The project, in his case, might have showed effectiveness in the social level, more than in the linguistic one.

Another point which differentiates Gabriel from

the others is the relation with his brother Daisuke. Unlike the others, Gabriel is not the first child. If there are differences between his personality and that of his brother's, such differences are not perceived by him as something important, as Ayaka and Richard apparently did. However, if Gabriel affirms never having thought about it, the matter seems of some importance at least to his mother Márcia, who sees her two sons as "opposites": Daisuke would be more "introvert", dedicated to studies and would have more Japanese friends; Gabriel, on the other hand, who has low results at school, would be more connected to Brazilian friends.

The contrast between the personalities of the two brothers explains, to some extent, two of Márcia's common behaviors. On the one hand, her strong expectations regarding Gabriel – for example, that he should feel himself as Brazilian, or that he should take studies more seriously and define a clearer plan for the future. On the other hand, her tendency to compare Gabriel to herself – an approximation similar to that of Hiroshi and his father. However, if the affinities between Hiroshi and his father were perceived as positive and, thus, replicable, in Márcia's case the "isolated" profile she recognizes in herself is something seen as negative, something she does not want to transmit to her son.

In some sense, Márcia seems to expect that Gabriel, close to her in terms of personality, will be able to follow a different path in life. Therefore, her insistence on mentioning the "opportunities" he is being offered, and also the incisive recommendation for him to graduate in vocational school in order not to remain an unskilled worker. This sense of personal sacrifice in benefit of the children, thus, would result in frustration every time she understands that Gabriel is not taking advantage of the "opportunities" she, Márcia, did not have in the past.

Strong as they are, her expectations regarding Gabriel are connected also with her ideas about identity construction. Defining Japanese people as more "reserved", she made Gabriel enroll in the project so that he could "open his mind", becoming, thus, "more Brazilian". Identifying Japaneseness with a certain degree of inflexibility – a negative impression probably derived from her experience in a mechanized industrial sector –, she describes the son as someone different from that, someone who "doesn't think as a Japanese".<sup>(19)</sup>

In terms of assertiveness in relation to their Brazilian identity, Márcia could be compared to Yukio. Even her segregated profile can be seen as an extrapolation of a

feature already observable, in a lower degree, in Hiroshi's father. Both of them share an affirmative sense of Brazilianness and a commanding perspective with regard to their children's identity. Although Márcia affirms that this is a matter that children should work out themselves, it is difficult to imagine that the mother's opinions would not influence Gabriel's own ideas.<sup>(20)</sup>

Compared, Hiroshi and Gabriel's cases seem to suggest that children whose parents have an affirmative attitude towards Brazilian cultural identity tend to show a stronger sense of Brazilianness themselves. Gabriel, like Hiroshi, sees himself mostly as Brazilian, although formulating this identity in his own particular way – for Gabriel, place of birth, for example, is not as important as parentage. The boys, who are close friends and share the same tendency towards affirming Brazilianness, have parents who dealt in a similar way with their identity construction process – the difference being that Márcia, more commanding, shows also a stronger tendency towards segregation, rather than integration. Nevertheless, children's trajectories in terms of language development are quite different: Hiroshi shows advanced skills, while Gabriel still presents many difficulties.

It is also interesting to observe that Hiroshi's refusal of formality, symbolized in his distaste for Japanese polite speech, seems to echo in Gabriel's criticism towards the hierarchical relations he sees as excessive in Japan. Opposed to this sense of hierarchy, which reminds us of the mother's discourse about "inflexibility", is Gabriel's self-perception as someone "adventurous", eager to have new experiences. This characteristic, which he might interpret as a certain sign of Brazilianness, could also be seen as a side of his personality directly connected with the dilemmas he is currently facing. In this sense, his unconnected desires of working in a bar or working as a model<sup>(21)</sup>, while reinforcing this sense of adventure, point also to the profile of someone who is yet in the search for a path in life, someone who is looking for an interest that, for the first time, might be strong enough to follow.

## 5. Conclusion

The fieldwork was conducted in parallel to a bibliographical review of the main themes of our investigation: the Brazilian community in Japan, identity and heritage language. One of the points that drew our attention, while going through this bibliography, was the fact that many of the studies conducted so far

were centered either on the *dekasegi* themselves, adult Brazilian workers who immigrated to Japan, or on their children – young people who, born in Brazil, came to Japan along with their parents and were put face to face with adaptation issues. This is what can be found in studies as Bornstein (1992)<sup>(22)</sup>, Kawamura (2000)<sup>(23)</sup>, Sasaki (2000)<sup>(24)</sup>, Linger (2001)<sup>(25)</sup>, Roth (2002)<sup>(26)</sup>, De Carvalho (2003)<sup>(27)</sup> and Tsuda (2003)<sup>(28)</sup>. Produced in a period that goes from the beginning of the 1990s to the first years of the new century, these works had the merit to depict the first phase of Brazilian immigration to Japan, characterized by the massive influx of *dekasegi*.

Today, however, almost three decades after the first *dekasegi* started to immigrate, many of the Brazilian citizens living in Japan comprehend already the second generation, formed by the children of the first one. Statistics from 2017<sup>(29)</sup> showed that 21.7% of the Brazilian citizens in Japan were people up to the age of 18, most of them considered to be in school age (6 to 18 years old). Many of them (as illustrated by the examples of this investigation) were born in Japan, as a result of relationships started in the country. Approaches to this second generation have been made by recent studies as Yamanouchi (2009)<sup>(30)</sup>, who wrote about Brazilian teenagers living in Japan, and Yamamoto (2013)<sup>(31)</sup>, who focused on the adaptation of children after their return to Brazil.

It is complicating, however, to speak about “adaptation” in the case of children who were born in Japan and had little or no contact with Brazilian society. It does not mean, of course, that these children are not subject to some difficulties, for example, in school – something that can happen with every student, especially those of foreign background –, but the fact is that, in many situations, it makes little sense speaking about “adapting to a new reality” if Japan is the only reality they know so far.<sup>(32)</sup> This was the impression we had during the interview with the students, whenever we asked them about eventual problems with “adaptation” in school. For some of them, the question seemed to sound simply inadequate.

It lies there, we believe, one of the distinctive achievements of this study: focusing on the second generation of Brazilian immigrants in Japan, composed of children whose upbringing took place in the country – a group of people on whom much is still to be investigated and understood. The second point of differentiation is the fact that, dealing with the concrete example of a volunteer

group in Sakai, the research was able to investigate the reality experienced by people living outside of a “diversity point” – area with higher concentration of foreigners (Tsuneyoshi, 2011)<sup>(33)</sup>. To some extent, the issues faced by the Brazilian community in Sakai might be, as suggested by scholars as Burgess (2011)<sup>(34)</sup>, more representative of the reality experienced by immigrants countrywide. Many of the previous studies focused on areas with larger concentration of Brazilian workers, as Hamamatsu (Roth, 2002) or Toyota (Linger, 2001).

As for the previous study on the same volunteer group, conducted by Tábata Quintana Yonaha (2016)<sup>(35)</sup>, it is possible to identify two main points of differentiation. While the author, analyzing the project through a linguistic approach, focused mainly on the maintenance of Portuguese as a heritage language, our main goal was to investigate the matter of identity perception, in an approach influenced mostly by Cultural Studies. Apart from that, we tried to focus as much as possible on the children, examining their own identity perceptions, while Yonaha opted to analyze the role of mothers’ beliefs and actions for the maintenance of heritage language.

## 5. 1. Findings

The analysis of the four cases presented in this paper raises a number of important issues involving the process of identity construction and its relation to heritage languages. From now on, we would like to draw attention to some of them, which seemed to us more significant.

The first one has to do with parents’ level of acculturation, quite varied among the *corpus* we worked with. Richard’s mother seems to be the only one that could be considered as *integrated*, since her appreciation of her own cultural roots does not prevent her from coming into contact with local culture. She was also the one who revealed a more up-to-date conception of language learning and the higher degree of consciousness in defining family’s language policy – a consciousness that is not noticeable in most of the other participants. Her profile and attitude seem to have positively influenced Richard, who shows satisfactory language skills and strong commitment to the project, as well as an affirmative perspective towards his own identity.

Parents who affirm Brazilianness more emphatically, as Yukio and Márcia, sometimes to the point of refusing significant contact with local society – an attitude that reveals a posture of *segregation* –, apparently transmit this strong sense of identity to their children, even

though this will not necessarily result in a higher language proficiency. An eloquent example of this is the comparison between Hiroshi and Gabriel, close friends, who grew to have different levels of Portuguese proficiency in spite of a common sense of Brazilianness. Results confirm impressions of previous studies as Oriyama's (2010)<sup>(36)</sup>, who stated that proficiency in heritage language is not always related to the sense of identification with the language's culture. In Hiroshi's case, the higher proficiency could be explained by a more consistent usage of Portuguese within the household, and also by a broader contact with the language through social media.

On the other hand, it is clear that the attitude of rejection towards the culture of the country of origin seen in Ayaka's mother (who shows signs of *assimilation*) has negatively influenced the language development of the daughter, who did not have sufficient amount of input, during her early years, nor had the possibility to come into contact with, and, consequently, become interested in Brazilian culture – two factors identified by Moloney & Oguro (2015)<sup>(37)</sup> as decisive in fostering heritage language. Paradoxically, though, Ayaka is the only one whose future plans involve directly a connection with Portuguese language.

The fact is that the desire to gain access to specific cultural artifacts does not appear, as in other studies, to be a strong motivation for learning the language. Apart from Hiroshi, who shows some interest for Brazilian audiovisual material available on the Internet, students do not mention any other example of this type of motivation. Apparently, Brazilian culture does not have, among young people, the same appeal as the “cultural ambassadors” *anime* and *manga* had among heritage learners of Japanese in Australia, for example<sup>(38)</sup>.

Another aspect we would like to draw attention to is the relationship with siblings and other family members, which frequently impacts participant's own identity perceptions. This is what happens with Richard and, especially, with Ayaka, for whom the differentiation between herself and the sister mirrors, to some extent, that of the borders between Brazilianness and Japaneseness. In Gabriel's case, the contrast with his older brother's personality seems less important for himself than for his mother's expectations for the children. As for Hiroshi, instead of the younger sister, it is apparently with the father he bears more similarities with.

In all the cases, the relation with close relatives,

whether siblings or parents, appears as important for two main reasons: firstly, because it is through this relation that, by comparison and contrast, individuals form their own image of themselves; secondly, because this daily coexistence reveals itself, for them, as a process of negotiation in which it is necessary to take into account not only what they think about themselves, but also what other people expect them to be.

However, it seems that the problem of self-definition, that is, pondering whether they should be considered “Japanese” or “Brazilian” (or any other simplified label like that), does not configure a matter of much importance to the young people analysed in this study. Frequently, they admit that this is not an issue they think much about. When stimulated to meditate about such matters, most of them end up reproducing traditional stereotypes of “Brazilianness” or “Japaneseness”, whether to reinforce these categories (speaking, for example, about Japanese as reserved and Brazilian as open-minded) or to put in doubt its validity (suggesting that there are no clear patterns for nationality and that each case should be analysed individually). Rather than from the children, the demand for a clearer definition seems to come from the parents, who oscillate from a less incisive posture (Ayaka and Richard's cases) to a more commanding attitude (Hiroshi and Gabriel's cases) towards children's identification “choices”.

As for the motivations for studying Portuguese, the fact is that most of the participants seem to have in mind, rather than a concrete possibility of using the language in the future, a wish to position themselves as “world citizens” – people capable of moving beyond the borders of Japaneseness or Brazilianness. This is the “future identity”<sup>(39)</sup> interviewees desire to possess, or the “imagined community”<sup>(40)</sup> they want to belong. Speaking Portuguese represents, for most of them, a possibility to acquire a certain cultural capital that would strengthen what we have been calling an “internationalist inclination”, clearly noticeable in Ayaka, Richard and Hiroshi, students with stronger involvement with the project. The wish to “move beyond”, as we formulated above, suggests also that we are dealing with “hybrid”<sup>(41)</sup> individuals, that seem to be located in a kind of “third-space”<sup>(42)</sup>, somewhere “in-between”<sup>(43)</sup> the two cultures that gave birth to them.

This positioning is reflected also in their future plans of going to the university to study languages, whether Portuguese or English – being Gabriel the only exception among the group. There is also a clear decreasing

*continuum* in terms of how certain they are about their next steps in life: the one who sounds more assertive is Ayaka, followed by Richard, Hiroshi and Gabriel. In common, they have the desire not to repeat the life trajectory of the parents, all of them employed in the industrial sector. This motivation, although not directly stated (except for Gabriel's mother), is noticeable by the way each of them pictures the future they have ahead.

Finally, it became clear that the main reason for joining the project, more than learning the language itself, was a will to come into contact with the Brazilian community. This was the case for almost all the children, except for Hiroshi, whose parents seem to have been motivated mainly by the linguistic aspect. Coincidentally or not, he is the one with higher proficiency in Portuguese, possibly because his family, more than others, placed a higher value on mastering the language.

Also students admit that, nowadays, the strongest motivation for going to classes is the perspective of interacting with friends. This might be one of the reasons behind the intermittent attendance of some of them, of which Gabriel is the only example analyzed. It is significant the number of students who go to the project only to attend Japanese classes or to have dinner along with their friends. We should not ignore some of the criticism towards the way the classes are conducted. We should, however, take into account the fact that this group of students, who have been taking the classes together for more than six years, are going through the process of becoming adults. They shall naturally express, as they grow older, a wish to take distance of the project in order to pursue their own projects in life.

When submitted to analysis and interpretation, the testimonies of our informants draw a complex picture of this second generation of Brazilian immigrants in Japan. If for the first generation issues as adaptation, strategy of acculturation or even homesickness constituted a matter of great concern, for the generation born in Japan other sort of challenges seem to be of greater importance. One of the matters, for instance, is related to the way to deal with a cultural background that reminds them of a place of origin – Brazil – of which they keep few or no concrete memories. Brazilian culture, after all, is something they came into contact with as an experience of displacement. Such feeling is certainly accentuated by the fact of living in a region with low concentration of Brazilian compatriots, and lies behind several other perceptions expressed during the interviews.

When compared to the cases presented by previous studies, the students analyzed in our investigation show also a higher appreciation for education and formal schooling. Different from some of the examples provided by Yamamoto (2013)<sup>(44)</sup>, who revealed cases of early school dropout and premature entrance into the labor market, the four young people interviewed by us are expected to graduate in high school, and many have the intention of entering university. As said before, the perspective of following the same professional path as their parents is something that seems not to fit in their plans for the future. Even though some of them might not show great enthusiasm for studying, an attitude to some extent expected for young people at their age, schooling is definitely something they consider necessary for their lives.

## 5. 2. Implications of the study

Considering the fact that Japan is growing to become a more and more multicultural nation, with the influx of immigrants from different countries, the findings of this investigation, although centered on the reality faced by Brazilian citizens, shall have positive implications also for the case of immigrants from other nations. We believe also that, when the matter is raising children in a multicultural context, educational challenges should embrace institutions as the school, the community and the family.

Our investigation showed the importance of school in promoting a more welcoming environment for children with foreign background. A school with a more libertarian conception of education and a curriculum that includes the discussion about themes as diversity and tolerance can certainly have a positive impact on children's process of identity construction, since the students will feel more comfortable to express their idiosyncrasies and affirm their difference. In this sense, it is also desirable that educational institutions create opportunities for children with foreign background to share their culture of origin with Japanese students – an experience from which both sides would immensely benefit.

On the part of educators, we should expect, in the first place, a professional qualification that enables them to handle with diversity following up-to-date conceptions about the theme, which will prevent them from transmitting to the children old ideas about miscegenation, bilingualism or identity, to mention only some key topics present on immigrants' children's

everyday life. Also, we should expect from teachers a proactive attitude within the classroom, in order to be able to identify difficulties faced by the children and interfere before they grow into bigger problems. Such an attitude requires an educator open not only to difference, but also to dialogue.

In addition to that, we should take into account, as suggested by testimonies heard from the children, the fact that in some Japanese schools the culture of discipline can sometimes be confused with over-authority. Strict rules regarding hairstyle, for example, could be interpreted, in other countries, as a violation of children's basic rights – something that can have serious impact on students' self-esteem and personality development.

As for the community, it would be interesting if volunteer groups already successfully established, as the one we analyzed in this study, could share their expertise with new initiatives – not only among Brazilian, but also other groups of immigrants – in other parts of the country, forming a collaboration network through which they could discuss educational strategies and share successful experiences.

Communitarian associations play also an important role in promoting the integration between groups of immigrants and Japanese society. By creating opportunities of cultural exchange between these groups, such initiatives enable local society, on the one side, to develop a new look on foreign citizens, and help immigrant families, on the other, not to feel isolated or segregated in their new home. When showing a more integrating posture and a less commanding attitude towards identity construction, families tend to allow children to explore more freely, and in a more productive way, their own sense of belonging.

It is our firm belief that opportunity for acquiring knowledge and experience with real people are the two pillars for building a relationship of tolerance and cultural exchange among people from different origins. With this investigation, we hope to have given a new contribution to this challenging purpose.

### Acknowledgement

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### Notes

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- (6) Yamamoto, K. (2013). "Kikoku shita kodomotachi to sono ato no seikatsu". In: Shimizu, K.; Yamamoto, B.; Kaji, I.; Hayashizaki, K. *'Ōkan suru hitobito' no kyōiku senryaku: gurōbaru shakai o ikiru kazoku to kōkyōiku no kadai*. Tokyo: Akashishoten, pp. 234-255.
- (7) Moloney, R. & Oguro, S. (2015). "To know what it's like to be Japanese". In: Nakane, I.; Otsuji, E.; Armour, W. S. *Languages and identities in a transitional Japan: from internationalization to globalization*. New York and London: Routledge, pp. 121-140.
- (8) All names have been changed in order to preserve informants' privacy.
- (9) Norton, B. & McKinney, C. (2011). "An identity approach to second language acquisition". In: Atkinson, D. *Alternative approaches to second language acquisition*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 82.
- (10) Linger, *Ibid.*, p. 76.
- (11) Berry, J. W. (1997). "Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation". *Applied Psychology: an international review*, 46 (1), pp. 5-68.
- (12) There was, in Ayaka's case, a lack of two important elements mentioned by Moloney & Oguro (*Ibid.*, p. 124): contact with the language and "opportunity to acquire knowledge", that is, a broader contact with the country of origin's lifestyle, culture, history, etc.
- (13) We are here echoing Linger's (*Ibid.*, p. 28) words, who instead of a "disembodied global perspective" recommends an approach capable of analyzing "microenvironments".
- (14) This past testimony, associated with the transformation Richard went through after joining the project, suggests a clear example of "deforeignization". For a discussion about the concept, refer to Lico, A. L. C. (2015). "Família, escola e comunidade no processo de ensino-aprendizagem de PLH: do começo ao fim". In: Jennings-Winterle, F. & Lima-Hernandes, M. C. *Português como língua de herança: a filosofia do começo, meio e fim*. New York: Brasil em Mente, p. 224.
- (15) It is difficult to avoid such stereotypes when trying to draw a picture of our participants. In this case, however, we thought it might be necessary to allude to such "images" in



- order to help the reader picturing Hiroshi's personality.
- (16) For a study about the usage of names among minorities in Japan, refer to Hatano, L. T. (2009). *Mainoriti no namae wa dono youni atsukawareteiru no ka: Nihon no kōritsu gakkō ni okeru nyūkama no baai*. Tokyo: Hitsuji Shobou.
- (17) The movie was produced by the Brazilian magazine *Alternativa*, which circulates in Japan, as part of a documentary series about the Brazilian community in the country.
- (18) The Japanese term “hāfu” is used to identify a child born to parents with different ethnic origins. Since the word bears historically a negative connotation, some people prefer using the equivalent “double”.
- (19) Márcia seems to have developed a very clear and strong “minority counteridentity”. This type of identity positioning would be formed when “minority groups refuse to identify with a negatively perceived dominant culture by asserting and maintaining a sense of ethnic difference in opposition to majority society”. Refer to Tsuda, T. (2003). *Strangers in the ethnic homeland: Japanese Brazilian return migration in transnational perspective*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 192.
- (20) We would be observing, thus, a typical case of identity “negotiation”, inasmuch as Gabriel's ideas conflict with his mother's expectations, forcing him to negotiate an interplay between *defining himself and being defined* by the mother. For a discussion on “negotiation”, refer to Pavlenko, A. & Blackledge, A. (2004). *Negotiating identities in multilingual contexts*. Clevedon, Buffalo, Toronto, Sidney: Multilingual Matter Ltd.
- (21) This case reminds us of Norton & McKinney's (*Ibid.*, p. 75) words about the concept of “investment”. According to the authors, language learners would be characterized for having “complex identity and multiple desires” and for “not only exchanging information with target language speakers”, but also “constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world”.
- (22) Bornstein, L. (1992). "From Carioca to Karaoke: Brazilian Guestworkers in Japan". *Berkeley Planning Journal*, 7 (1). Berkeley: University of California.
- (23) Kawamura, L. (2000). *Nihon shakai to burajirujin imin*. Tokyo: Akashi Shoten.
- (24) Sasaki, E. M. (2000). “Dekasseguis: trabalhadores migrantes nipo-brasileiros no Japão”. *Textos NEPO*, 39. Campinas: UNICAMP, Núcleo de Estudos de População.
- (25) Linger, *Ibid.*
- (26) Roth, *Ibid.*
- (27) De Carvalho, D. (2003). *Migrants and identity in Japan and Brazil: the Nikkeijin*. London and New York: Routledge Curzon.
- (28) Tsuda, *Ibid.*
- (29) Data provided by the Consulate General of Brazil in Tokyo, based on statistics provided by ministries of the two countries. Retrieved December 29, 2018, from: <http://cgtoquio.itaraty.gov.br/pt-br/estatisticas\_e\_bibliografia.xml>.
- (30) Yamanouchi, Y. (2009). “Zainichi nikkei burajirujin t̄ineija no ‘teikō’”. In: Shimizu, K. *Esunishiti to kyōiku. Nihon no kyōiku to shakai*, 17, pp. 226-235.
- (31) Yamamoto, *Ibid.*
- (32) Among the studies which present the challenges posed by this new generation, we draw attention to Shibuya, M. (2013). *Rūtsu kara rūto e: nyūkama no kodomo tachi no ima*. *Intercultural Education*, 37, pp. 1-14.
- (33) Tsuneyoshi, *Ibid.*
- (34) Burgess, *Ibid.*
- (35) Yonaha, T. Q. (2016). *O PLH no contexto de emigrantes brasileiros no Japão: crenças e ações de mães brasileiras*. Dissertação de Mestrado. Brasília: Universidade de Brasília.
- (36) Oriyama, K. (2010). “Heritage language maintenance and Japanese identity formation: what role can schooling and ethnic community contact play?” *Heritage Language Journal*, 7(2), pp. 76-110.
- (37) Moloney & Oguro, *Ibid.*, p. 124.
- (38) Moloney & Oguro, *Ibid.*
- (39) Moloney & Oguro, *Ibid.*, p. 134.
- (40) Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London and New York: Verso.
- (41) Hall, S. (1990). “Cultural identity and diaspora”. In: Rutherford, J. *Identity: community, culture, difference*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, pp. 222-237.
- (42) Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. London and New York: Routledge.
- (43) Bhabha, H. K. (1996). “Culture's In-Between”. In: Hall, S. & Du Gay, P. *Questions of cultural identity*. London: Sage, pp. 53-60.
- (44) Yamamoto, *Ibid.*

## 【日本語要旨】

## 日本在住日系ブラジル人青年のアイデンティティ認識

## — 継承語としてのポルトガル語学習者のケース・スタディ —

ダニエル・セラーノ 元奈良教育大学教員研修留学生

渋谷 真樹 奈良教育大学学校教育講座（教育学）

本研究は、大阪府堺市においてボランティアで行われている継承語としてのポルトガル語教室に通っている、4人の日系ブラジル人青年を対象としたケース・スタディである。対象者達は、1990年代に製造業で働くために来日した日系ブラジル人の「デカセギ」労働者の子どもである。彼らは、日本で生まれ育ち、日系ブラジル人の非集住地域に住んでいる。

本研究は、彼らのアイデンティティについての語りを提示し、解釈することを通して、ポルトガル語の接触度や流暢さがさまざまな彼らが、どのようにアイデンティティを形成し、認識していくのかを明らかにすることを目的とする。

本研究からは、きょうだいなどの家族との関係に加え、両親の日本社会での文化変容のレベルが、子どもの所属意識に強い影響を与えていることが明らかになった。また、対象とした移民第二世代は、学校や教育を重要視し、しばしば将来計画に含めていることや、文化的にブラジルのなものと日本的なものを混淆させた側面をもち、外国語学習や海外移住を志向するなど国際的な傾向があることが明らかになった。