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**PHD THESIS**

Teaching Japanese Pragmatics:  
*ne, yo, and yone* in Italian University Classrooms

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## Abstract

This dissertation addresses a persistent challenge in Japanese as a Foreign Language: the acquisition and teaching of interactional particles *ne*, *yo*, and *yone*, which are crucial for pragmatic nuance in everyday talk. Despite their centrality in interaction, textbooks often reduce them to simplified, prescriptive meanings, leaving learners with incomplete understandings. The study adopts the Place of Negotiation framework (Maynard, 2002) to conceptualize these particles across three interrelated “places” of meaning-making: cognitive (information management and epistemic positioning), emotive (affective stance and empathy), and interactional (participation management and sequential organization). Building on this tripartite model, the dissertation designs and implements a corpus-informed, noticing-oriented instructional intervention using pedagogically mediated video extracts and transcripts from the Corpus of Everyday Japanese Conversation (CEJC), combined with a translanguaging-informed classroom pedagogy.

Conducted as a single-session intervention with two MA-level Japanese language classes at the University of Naples L’Orientale, the research examines (1) how learners’ perceptions of *ne*, *yo*, *yone* shift before and after the lesson, and (2) how learners position themselves ideologically between native-speakerist views of competence and a translanguaging-informed perspective. Data include pre- and post-lesson questionnaires, classroom recordings, and semi-structured interviews. Findings indicate meaningful development in learners’ metapragmatic awareness, with learners moving toward more context-sensitive interpretations of the particles along the cognitive, emotive, and interactional dimensions, while also revealing tensions around managing translanguaging so that it supports reflection without displacing the target language. The study contributes methodological and pedagogical insights for teaching pragmatics through authentic spoken data while foregrounding learner perspectives and language ideologies.

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doubted myself. To my friends, thank you for your understanding, your humour, and your ability to make me see the brighter side, no matter how tough things seemed.

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## Orthographic conventions

In this thesis, the Hepburn system is adopted when transcribing Japanese into the Roman alphabet, in order to allow readers without prior knowledge of Japanese to approximate the original pronunciation more closely. Developed by missionary James Curtis Hepburn (1815-1911), the system is based on English spelling conventions and is the most widely used in academic and literary contexts. According to the Hepburn system:

- Long vowels are expressed by the macron ( $\bar{a}, \bar{i}, \bar{u}, \bar{e}, \bar{o}$ ). However, in the transcribed dialogue data, vowel length may occasionally be marked through doubling (e.g., *nee*) in order to emphasize prosodic duration as perceived in speech.
- The particle  $\sim$  is written as *e*.
- The particle  $\text{は}$  is written as *wa*.
- The particle  $\text{を}$  is written as *o*.
- The  $\text{ん}$  is transcribed as *n*.
- Double consonants are marked by doubling the consonant following the *sokuon* 促音 ( $\text{っ} / \text{ッ}$ ), with specific renderings such as  $\text{sh} \rightarrow \text{ssh}$ ,  $\text{ch} \rightarrow \text{tch}$ , and  $\text{ts} \rightarrow \text{tts}$ .

In some cited examples, however, an alternative romanization system, the *kunreishiki* 訓令式 ‘Cabinet Ordinance System’, is used. *Kunreishiki* is the official system, still taught in Japanese schools, and the most easily understood by Japanese people. It is systematic and more appropriate for describing the peculiarities of the Japanese language, which is why it is employed especially by linguists. It differs from the previous one as follows (Figure 1).

[Figure 1: Hepburn system and *Kunreishiki* system in comparison]

	Hepburn	<i>Kunreishiki</i>
[ɛ]	<i>sha, shi, shu, sho</i>	<i>sya, si, syu, syo</i>
[tɕ]	<i>cha, chi, chu, cho</i>	<i>tya, ti, tyu, tyo</i>
[tɕɯ]	<i>tsu</i>	<i>tu</i>
[d͡z]	<i>ja, ji, ju, jo</i>	<i>zya, zi, zyu, zyo</i>
[ɸɯ]	<i>fu</i>	<i>hu</i>

(Hasegawa, 2018, p. 6)



So	Capitals mark increased loudness, compared to the surrounding talk.
nande?	Question mark indicates rising intonation for questions.
de,	Comma is used for continuing intonation.
-	A hyphen placed after a whole word or part of a word signals an abrupt interruption.
^	The circumflex symbol shows an increase in pitch.

## (2) CEJC-style transcription conventions

CEJC data are transcribed following the conventions of the National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics<sup>1</sup>. These conventions are also used in Appendix 6. The only modification is the addition of the square bracket notation following Jefferson (2004), to indicate overlapping speech within this transcription style.

- (1.0) Duration of silence
- : Vowel lengthening
- End of utterance
- % Hesitation in pronouncing the word
- ? Rising intonation
- (L) Laugh
- (F) Expression like *ano* あの and *sono* その used to fill pause
- (D) Words left hanging
- (W) Pronunciation errors
- (U) Unclear points
- (G) Colloquial expressions that are not understood
- (K) Points where the kanji do not faithfully represent the spoken form
- (I) Exclamations like *a* あ and *e* え when integrated into the discourse
- (Y) Pronunciation and reading of the characters differ

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www2.ninjal.ac.jp/conversation/cejc/transcript.html>

## Abbreviations used for the interlinear gloss

This thesis adopts the Leipzig Glossing system. The rules of the system were developed at the Department of Linguistics of the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in collaboration with the Department of Linguistics of the University of Leipzig (Comrie, et.al. 2008). The grammatical categories are segmented through hyphens ( - ), and words glossing in multiple elements are represented by the various words separated through a dot (.). As in the following examples:

(0) itta koto ga aru  
go-PST NMLZ SBJ exist  
'(I) have gone there before.'

The category labels used in the interlinear gloss are the following ones.

CAUS	causative	COMPL	completive
COND	conditional	COP	copula
DET	determiner	GEN	genitive particle
IMP	imperative	INS	instrumental
LOC	locative	NEG	negative
NMLZ	nominalizer	OBJ	object
PASS	passive	PROG	progressive
PROX	proximal	PST	past
Q	question marker	QUOT	quotative
SBJ	subject	TOP	topic

In some cases, when the transcribed speech cannot be adequately explained through the established Leipzig Glossing rules, additional glosses are provided.

CONJ	conjunctive	DES	desiderative
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IP	interactional particle	POL	politeness marker
POT	potential marker	STAT	resultant state

Different gloss labels are used in quoted examples by cited authors, reported as in the original sources. This includes variation in formatting, such as the use of lowercase (Neg, Cop). Labels such as FP (final particle), IP (interactional particle), and PRT (particle) are maintained according to the original usage in the cited sources, despite partial overlaps.

Clancy P. M. (1985)

AGR	agreement	EMPH	emphatic
EP	extended predicate	NONPAST	non-past tense

Cook H. M. (1992)

FP	sentence-final particle	LK	linking nominal
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Katagiri (2007)

QUES	question marker
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Kamio (1994)

-F	formal form	NM	nominative marker
QM	question marker	SF	sentence-final particle
TM	topic marker		

Hayano (2011)

CP	copula <i>be</i>	ITJ	interjection
FP	final particle	PRT	particle
TP	topic particle		

Maynard (1993)

BE	the copula 'be'	IP	interactional particle
LK	linker	NOM	nominalizer
QT	quotative marker	T	theme marker

Masuda (2011, 2021)

ACC	accusative marker	COP/Cop	copula
DM	discourse marker	IP	interactional particles
LC	locative marker	Neg	negative form
NL	nominalizer	PRS	present tense
Q	question marker	QT	quotative marker
S	subject marker		

Morita (2005, 2012a, 2012b)

DES	desiderative	INTJ	interjection
MOD	modal auxiliary	N	nominalizer
PAST	past form	POT	potential form
PRT	interactional particle	QUO	quotative particle
SUB	subject	TE	<i>-te</i> (conjunctive) form
VOL	volitional		

## Introduction

This thesis tackles a persistent challenge in Japanese language education: the delayed and often difficult acquisition of the sentence-final particles *ne*, *yo*, and *yone* by learners of Japanese. These particles are central to managing interaction, negotiating talk, and expressing subtle shades of meaning in everyday communication, making them crucial for effective language use. In today's globalized world, with increasing multilingualism and student mobility, overcoming these obstacles is more important than ever for both learners and instructors.

Situated within the field of foreign language pragmatics teaching, this project introduces innovative classroom methodologies, including the use of a corpus-informed approach based on excerpts from spontaneous spoken Japanese, mediated by the instructor, and the pedagogical application of *translanguaging*, that is, the strategic use of learners' entire linguistic repertoires, including their L1, for learning and meaning-making, incorporating them into both lesson design and classroom practice. It also explores learners' stances toward *native-speakerism*, the ideology that privileges L1 users<sup>2</sup> as the ideal language models, reflecting on how these ideologies shape their classroom and learning experience.

I first encountered the concept of translanguaging at the end of my MA, thanks to Professor Patrick Heinrich, who encouraged me to explore the topic further. The idea of recalibrating the role of L1 and other languages in the language classroom proved both fascinating and transformative, and it quickly became central to my approach. Later, during my research stay at Hosei University, I had the opportunity to deepen my understanding of both pragmatics teaching and translanguaging, thanks to Professor Noriko Ishihara's expertise and mentorship. During the period there, I also came across native-speakerism, and the problematic importance of L1-user-like fluency in language teaching and learning. The theoretical and practical tools acquired during this period have greatly informed the design of the present project. My research is grounded in the belief that these two perspectives are closely linked: translanguaging challenges the boundaries of native-like competence and recognizes multilingual speakers as resourceful, not deficient.

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<sup>2</sup> In the thesis, I opted for the term "L1 user" instead of the more common "native speaker" to avoid perpetuating a native-speakerist perspective (Takeuchi, 2020, 2023) as further discussed in III.I.3. The term "native speaker" often implies that proficiency and legitimacy in using a language are inherently tied to one's origin, potentially excluding or devaluing non-native speakers, here on "learners" or "L2 users". This choice not only shifts the focus to ability but also helps mitigate bias and discrimination, promoting a more inclusive and equitable view of language users (Cook, V., 2007).

My commitment to this research arose from personal experiences that highlighted how enigmatic and multifaceted Japanese sentence-final particles can be. My curiosity was first sparked, almost casually, when my friend and colleague, Chiara Manno, after attending a conference in Japan, brought up the ongoing scholarly debates on the definition of *ne* as a sentence-final particle. This led me to observe its use more closely in everyday interaction, while I was still there on exchange. I soon realized not only how difficult it was to explain its usage, but also how uncertain I was about my own use in conversation.

This curiosity became the basis for my MA thesis, during which I recorded Italian friends living in Japan as they interacted with their Japanese friends. What emerged was in line with previous research on the topic: even after six to twelve months of immersion, some learners avoided these particles entirely, while others overused them, and only a few used them more consciously. These contrasting behaviors convinced me that a new approach was needed, one that moved beyond prescriptive rules and fostered deeper metapragmatic awareness in learners. This realization became the foundation for the present doctoral research.

Despite extensive research, the functions of *ne*, *yo*, and *yone* remain only partially understood: their meanings are subtle, context-dependent, and challenging for learners to master. While scholars have highlighted the roles of these particles in information negotiation, empathy, and interactional management, this complexity is rarely mirrored in widely used textbooks, which typically reduce their explanation to basic, prescriptive functions. As a result, learners struggle to understand these particles appropriately, even at advanced levels or after immersion in Japan. Mastery of sentence-final particles goes far beyond simply learning the rules; it is essential for genuine communication, successful cultural integration, and the development of a nuanced linguistic identity<sup>3</sup>.

To address this gap, I propose a new approach for teaching the pragmatic and interactional meanings of *ne*, *yo*, and *yone*, avoiding rigid definitions in favor of noticing-based activities built around selected CEJC excerpts (Corpus of Everyday Japanese Conversation) (Koiso et al., 2022), presented in a guided and pedagogically mediated format. This instructional intervention, which combines corpus-informed materials and a translanguaging-oriented pedagogy, was implemented as a single-session experiment with two classes of MA students at the University of Naples L'Orientale. These methodological choices reflect a pedagogical stance that prioritizes

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<sup>3</sup> *Identity* refers to how an individual perceives their connection to the world, how this connection evolves over time and in different contexts, being in a state of continuous change. These reflect verbal and non-verbal behaviors, influencing the speaker's position in interaction (Ishihara 2019; Norton, 2005).

exposure to spontaneous interaction and recognizes the learners' full linguistic repertoires as resources for meaning-making.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do learners perceive *ne*, *yo*, and *yone* before and after the lesson, and does their position change?
2. How do learners position themselves ideologically between a native-speakerist view of competence and a translanguaging-informed perspective?

By pursuing these questions, this thesis aims to contribute to both the theory and practice of Japanese language pedagogy, with a particular focus on metapragmatic awareness and learner identity. This research brings together corpus-informed activities, translanguaging pedagogy, and a focus on learner perspectives. By highlighting learner voices and reflecting on teaching ideologies, the thesis moves beyond traditional, prescriptive methods, contributing new viewpoints on the acquisition of *ne*, *yo*, and *yone*, and on L2 pragmatics more broadly.

Data were collected through pre- and post-instruction surveys, classroom recordings, and semi-structured interviews, examining not only methodological outcomes but also learners' perspectives on translanguaging and native-speakerism. While the intervention was conducted with a relatively small group of intermediate-advanced learners in an Italian university context, the findings offer valuable insights that can be adapted and tested in other settings.

The thesis is structured in two main parts. The first part reviews the relevant literature on the sentence-final particles and their acquisition, offering critical reflections. Chapter I frames previous research on these particles within intersubjective and modality perspectives, delineating their multifaceted meanings, and ultimately proposes a research-based explanation presented during the classroom intervention. These descriptions are not intended to be definitive, but rather to prompt deeper reflection and foster learners' metapragmatic reasoning and awareness. Chapter II surveys the literature on the acquisition of *ne*, *yo*, and *yone*, as well as their treatment in Japanese language textbooks and recent work on methodologies to teach these resources.

The second part presents the theoretical and methodological framework adopted for the study, followed by a discussion of the research findings. Chapter III introduces the theoretical background and design of the instructional intervention. Chapter IV discusses the results and offers conclusions and directions for future research, including detailed learner portraits. These portraits foreground the diversity of student experiences and challenge the notion of a uniform L2 acquisition process.

In conclusion, this work aspires to advance both the understanding and the practice of teaching Japanese pragmatics, while foregrounding the diversity of language learners in today's interconnected world. Insights from this research may inform the design of future instructional materials and teacher training, ultimately fostering more effective and inclusive Japanese language education.