Living with, and Living in Language: How Two Pioneering "Border-Crossing" Writers of Japanese Identify with Language

言語と生きることと、言語で生きることについて――日本語で書く二人の先駆的な「越境作家」における言語的アイデンティティー

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Abstract

Near the turn of the 21st century, two pioneering "border-crossing" writers of Japanese with American nationality, Levy Hideo and Arthur Binard, made highly contrasting statements about the significance of asking what language it is that we use in our lives. While Levy emphasized the importance of asking such a question, Binard argued that we should not ask what specific language people use, but rather, how we use that language. In this paper, I interpret these statements as representing the authors' stances towards linguistic identity and consider them in relation to each author's literary career, also making reference to theories of bilingualism (Nishi 2014) and subjectivity formation (Sakai 1997). In the second part of the paper, I conduct a close reading of two poems from Binard's debut poetry collection, *Catch and Release* (2000), indicating that despite apparent differences with Levy, Binard also suggests the primacy and determinative aspects of language choice. Finally, I consider how such a conception of linguistic identity is relevant to learners and teachers of a "foreign language" from my own perspective as a lecturer in an international studies faculty in Japan.

Keywords: Japanophone literature, Border-crossing writers, Linguistic identity, Bilingualism

要旨

21 世紀の変わり目近くに、ともに米国籍を持ち、先駆的な「越境作家」であるリービ英雄とアーサー・ビナードは、「何語で生きるか」をめぐり互いに対照的な発言をした。リービがそうした問いを立てることの重要性を強調したのに対し、ビナードはむしろ、何語であるかという問題以前に、言語をどのように使うかを問うべきだと主張した。本稿では、これらの発言を両作家の言語的アイデンティティーに対する姿勢の表明として捉え、それぞれの創作活動の文脈に位置づけた上で、バイリンガリズム（西 2014）と主体性（酒井 1997）に関する理論を参照し、考察する。その上で、ビナードのデビュー詩集『釣り上げては』（2000）に収録されている詩二編を取り上げ、その分析を通じて、一見リービとは姿勢が大きく異なるものの、ビナードの詩も言語の選択が持つ重要性と使用者の行動と思考を規制する側面に対する認識が読み取れることを明らかにする。最後に、こうした言語的アイデンティティーの捉え方が「外国語」の習得と教育に携わる者にとって持つ意味について、日本の大学の国際学部に勤める立場から考察する。

キーワード：　日本語文学、越境作家、言語的アイデンティティー、バイリンガリズム

Introduction

> All human beings, since time immemorial, have experienced the world through a certain language, and expressed themselves and their relation to others through a certain script, which have not necessarily aligned with their origin. What nationality we are remains an important question, but so is the question of what language we live in. (Levy 2007, 216)

> I'm very happy to be called a Japanophone writer, but rather than the question of what language one writes in, the question of what one writes is of more importance, in my opinion. In other words, how do you interact with society, and how do you put those things you discover into words? That's the sort of relationship with language that I think is important. And then the question of how one lives. How does one live within language? Not the question of what language one lives in, but the question of how one lives. (Binard et al. 2009, 256)

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One of the most significant and conspicuous developments in the field of Japanophone literature (*Nihongo bungaku*) over the past decades is the emergence of a new generation of "border-crossing writers" (*ekkyō sakka*) whose lives and writing activities span multiple regions and languages, in many cases choosing to write in Japanese despite it not being native to them, but rather, a language they acquired in late adolescence or early adulthood. As has been noted by prior research, a common theme among such writers is a self-reflection on their acquisition of the Japanese language, something which allows (particularly native) readers to

experience second-hand what it is like to encounter the Japanese language from an outside perspective and rediscover it in the process (Guo 2013, 424). This common theme also indicates the centrality of the question of linguistic identity for such writers. That is to say, they are compelled, through a combination of internal drive and external pressure, to ask themselves: "Why do I write in Japanese? What does it say about me?"

The purpose of this paper is to consider the issue of linguistic identity, or identification with language, in the case of two pioneering "border-crossing writers" of Japanese who are both of American nationality, and who have both been recognized with prestigious awards in their respective fields of prose and poetry: Levy Hideo (リービ英雄, full name Ian Hideo Levy, born in California 1950; Japanese literary debut in 1987) and Arthur Binard (アーサー・ビナード, born in Michigan in 1967; Japanese literary debut in 2000)[1].

Rather than attempting a comprehensive study of each author's stance, something which has not necessarily been constant throughout their careers, I will focus on two contrasting statements made by the writers near the turn of the 21st century, as quoted above via my own translation into English. The first quote is the conclusion of an essay by Levy titled "The Language We Live in" (*Hito wa 'nanigo' de ikiru no ka*), originally published in the *Asahi Shimbun* in 2004, in which he discusses the fluidity of identity in pre-modern East Asia, and laments the attachment to rigid national identities in modern times. The second quote is from Binard's opening comments during a roundtable discussion between "border-crossing writers"—among whom Levy was not included—held in November 2005. It is not clear if Binard was specifically aware of Levy's statement when he articulated his stance, but reference to Levy in a separate interview, conducted a few years later, suggests that Levy and his stance towards language has been a useful reference point for Binard in navigating his own (Binard 2013, 207).

In essence, the two statements support a simple conclusion: Levy is a writer who identifies strongly with the Japanese language, while Binard seeks to transcend identification with a specific language in pursuit of a more universal ideal. However, as I will argue through analysis of Binard's Japanese poetry, despite a difference in nuance, both writers imply that for them, Japanese is far more than a neutral medium of expression but rather something intrinsically bound with their own selves, in particular in their capacity as individuals involved in creative writing using the Japanese language.

Before proceeding to the main analysis, however, I feel compelled to ask myself a similar question: "Why am I writing this in English? What does it say about me?" To do so may be a departure from conventional academic style, but in this case, I believe it is important to frame the issue of linguistic identity within the context of my own research activities, and remind both readers and myself that it is and always will be a topic which prompts and demands intense personal reflection.

[1] In this paper, I refer to Levy by his family name first and Binard by his forename first, reflecting the difference in their "pen names", i.e. how they present themselves to readers in Japanese.

A part of the answer to the question certainly lies within the act of translation: the act of faithfully representing words and ideas spoken or written in Japanese and conveying them to another audience through the medium of a different language, in this case English. The quote from Levy, which is very much a starting point of this inquiry, is something I translated into English myself while an undergraduate student in the UK—my country of origin—over ten years ago. While since then, I completed postgraduate study in Japan, primarily using Japanese, and still remain committed to conducting and producing research using the language, the above-quoted statement by Levy has continued to reverberate in my consciousness, not only in the Japanese original, but also in my translation. To that extent, I feel there is an intrinsic value in expanding upon that translation-interpretation through the medium of English.

More to the point, my appointment as lecturer in an international studies faculty at a Japanese university, which emphasizes the acquisition and use of English as a medium of intercultural communication, and the invitation to share my work at the faculty's research symposium in July 2023, served as an opportunity to return to this unfinished act of interpretation. This paper, then, which is based on that presentation which I gave in English, is an attempt to bring that act of interpretation to a close, and to try to more explicitly apply whatever insights about linguistic identity can be read from the above statements to the everyday practice of students and teachers in an academic setting grounded in the acquisition and active use of foreign languages.

Firstly, it is necessary to provide some background context to the statements made by each author and the apparent conflict between them.

Levy and Binard's Statements in the Context of Bilingualism Theory

As noted above, the respective statements of Levy and Binard, especially when placed next to each other, suggest a strikingly different stance towards linguistic identity. While Levy directly argues for the importance of asking the question: "What language do people live in?", Binard argues on the contrary that the way we use language is more important than the question of what that language is. Grammatically, the statements are identical: both refer to "the question of what language one lives in" ("*nanigo de ikiru ka"*), the former claiming it to be important and the latter dismissing it. Although Binard does ask how we live "within language" ("*gengo no naka de*"), Levy's statement implies a greater weight on how we inhabit a language, i.e. how we live *in* language, whereas Binard's approach suggests a more utilitarian stance towards language as a tool that we wield, i.e. how we live *with* language, or how we use it in our lives.

A brief overview of both writers' careers would support the view that their stances vis-à-vis linguistic identity are wholly different. Levy, after teaching as a professor of Japanese literature at Princeton and Stanford University and receiving accolades for his English translation of Japanese classic the *Man'yōshū* (*The Ten Thousand Leaves*; Levy 1981), decided to embark upon a new career as a writer of Japanese fiction in his late thirties. Following the publication of part one of his three-part debut novel "Seijōki no kikoenai heya" in literary magazine *Gunzō* in 1987 (translated into English as *A Room Where the Star-Spangled Banner Cannot Be Heard* by Christopher D. Scott in 2011), he permanently moved to Tokyo to commit himself to writing in Japanese full time.

Further demonstrating Levy's commitment to the language, he has also described his preference to speak in Japanese when invited to speak in international settings, even when their primary language is English (Levy 2007, 44). Far more than simply being confident in his mastery of the language, Levy reflects upon the significant amount of time he has spent in Japan, and the significance of lived experiences mediated by the Japanese language—ranging from interpersonal relationships to his own engagement with literature written in Japanese—to radically question whether there is truly a worthwhile distinction to be made between his own connection to the Japanese language and that of, in his words, "the so-called Japanese for whom Japanese is their native tongue" (Levy 2013, 193), at least within the context of literary production.

Binard, in contrast, does not seem to be a writer as preoccupied with the question of whether or not his use of Japanese is seen as equal to that of his Japanese peers, and by extension, the question of what language it is that he lives in (i.e. his linguistic identity). Levy has claimed that he wrote his debut novel in Japanese because it was his specific intent to write *in Japanese*, and had he written the same thing in English it would have "just been a translation from Japanese" (Levy 2004, 162). He has even spoken of his inability to translate himself into English, as remarked upon by Binard (Binard 2013, 207). Binard, on the other hand, seems free from this limitation: the Nakahara Chuya Prize presented to Binard for his debut poetry collection came with the promise of translation into English, and he elected to do it himself (Binard 2013, 207). It is titled *Tsuriagetewa* (釣り上げては) in the original, and in Binard's own translation, *Catch and Release*.

Binard's ability to carry out this feat may be explained by an identity which is not necessarily bound to a specific language. In the afterword to his collection of essays published in 2011, *Amerika ni mo makezu* (*Neither Snow, nor Rain, nor the U.S.A.*; the English title is on the cover and was presumably chosen by the author himself), Binard problematizes the preoccupation with "nativeness" in Japanese society from his perspective as a native speaker of English. Building upon this social critique, he suggests a creative re-imagining of the concept "native" which is less grounded in the circumstances of one's birth and more so in one's roots more broadly defined, and goes on to assert that "rooting himself" in Japan should not have to mean "cutting off" his American roots—a one-or-the-other kind of thinking that he rejects as an "exclusionary identity"—but rather he should be able to nurture both sets of roots simultaneously (Binard 2011, 250). Indeed, his playful rewriting of "ネイティブ" ("*neitibu*" = native) as "根ッティブ" (pronounced almost identically but with the character meaning "root", pronounced "*ne*", inserted at the beginning) is itself an attempt to fuse elements of English and Japanese together, creating a new apparatus with which to perceive the world. Nevertheless, the fact that this reconceptualization of "native" is conducted via creative use of language, incorporating elements of English vocabulary, Chinese characters with a native Japanese reading, and Japanese katakana, suggests that for Binard too, language is significant: his identity too is at least partly a linguistic one.

The two writers' contrasting stances towards linguistic identity might be better conceptualized via reference to the two models of bilingualism presented by scholar of

comparative literature, Masahiko Nishi: "bilingualism by addition" (*tashizan sareta bairingarizumu*) and "bilingualism by division" (*warizan sareta bairingarizumu*). To paraphrase, "bilingualism by addition" describes the process by which an individual newly acquires "foreign languages" as a form of "self-empowerment", building upon the firm foundation of their "one and only mother tongue" (Nishi 2014, 149). In contrast, "bilingualism by division" refers to people who experience a conflict between the various languages they have acquired, often due to forces beyond their own control, resulting in a far less stable linguistic foundation (Nishi 2014, 149-150).

These different forms of linguistic identity could be represented graphically as shown below (Figures 1 and 2). Figure 1 illustrates bilingualism by addition, whereby the primacy of the mother tongue serves a stabilizing function that enables the learning of foreign languages. Figure 2 depicts bilingualism by division, together with the "being torn" feeling so often articulated by individuals whose lives straddle multiple cultures and languages; the English "I" ("I think") and Japanese "*ware*" ("*ware omō*") both vying for primacy, pulling the self in opposing directions.

It could be argued that the model is oversimplistic for its singular focus on language and disregard for other aspects of individual identity and subjectivity, such as the potential for a

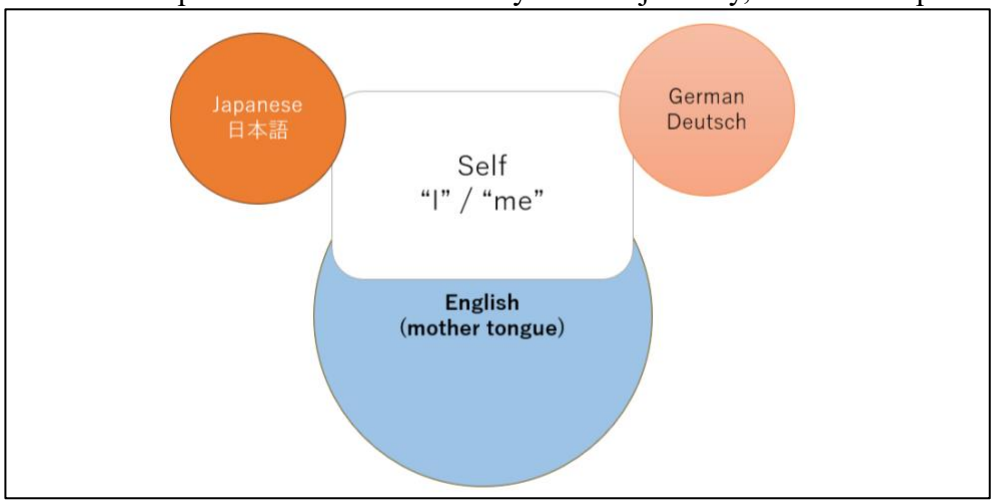

Figure 1: Bilingualism by addition (based on Nishi 2014).

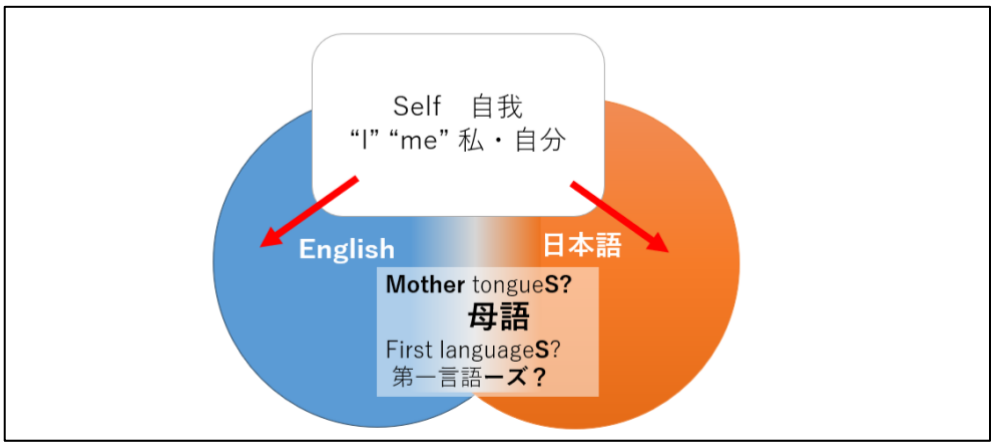

Figure 2: Bilingualism by division (based on Nishi 2014).

self which exists a priori to language, as is implied by Binard. However, while Binard might not necessarily privilege English as his "one and only mother tongue" (Nishi 2014, 149), his readiness to grow in a bicultural direction suggests that he fits more closely within the additive model.

Similarly, my summary description of Levy's career above might suggest that, far from having a divided linguistic identity, he is settled in his new adopted primary language of Japanese. However, such an interpretation would overlook the constant questioning that characterizes his work. As succinctly put by Christopher D. Scott in his "Translator's Introduction" to *A Room Where the Star-Spangled Banner Cannot Be Heard*, "Levy's work is about the struggle or productive tension between writing in Japanese and not being Japanese, or the dilemma of being a writer of Japanese but not a Japanese writer" (Scott 2011, x-xi). Only the divided self would face such a dilemma, even if in this case division arises not from a conflict between English and Japanese as such, but more between "being Japanese" or perhaps "becoming Japanese" and "not being Japanese"; or rather, between "becoming Japanese" and remaining authentic to his mixed cultural and linguistic heritage; him being born to parents of Jewish American and Polish American ancestry and having spent part of his youth in Taiwan and Hong Kong (Davis 2025).

It would be all too easy to simply view the divisive condition as an ailment that must be overcome and the additive model as an ideal to be valorized and pursued. The draw towards being Japanese or becoming Japanese can be explained partly as a result of symmetrical thinking, and the way that as learners of language we often try to emulate a so-called model native speaker and attempt to mirror their image at the expense of whatever other linguistic resources we may have (see Figures 3 and 4); in problematizing symmetrical thinking, I draw from Sakai (1997a, 51; 1997b, 52-53). While this is clearly problematic, there is also an inevitability to this, insofar as we use language within distinct speech communities which function with their own rules, and successful communication often requires that those rules are respected, entailing a degree of assimilation. If such a premise is accepted, it follows that the conflict inherent to bilingualism by division is something that any individual who acquires and uses more than one language to a significant extent must learn to live with, rather than attempt to overcome entirely.

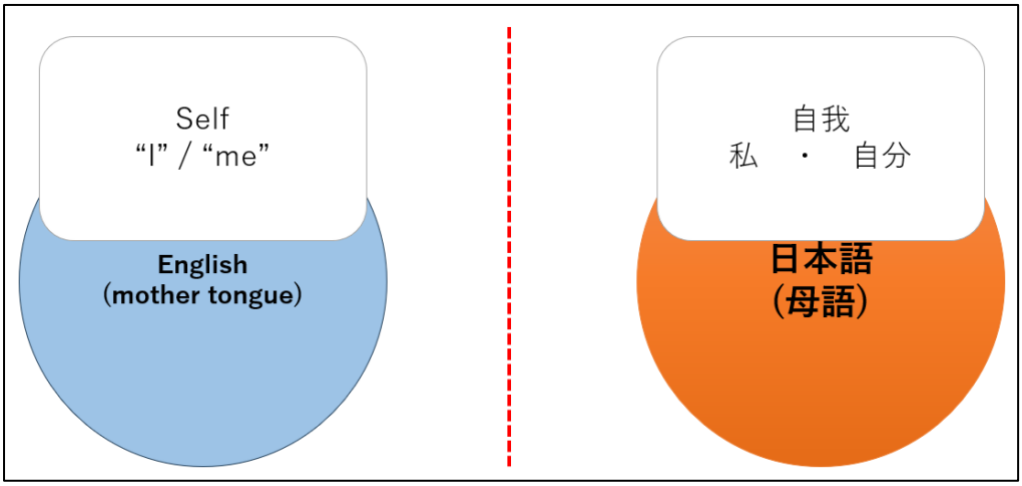

Figure 3: Symmetrical thinking and its limits (1). This figure represents the way cultures and individuals perceive their subjectivity as symmetrical to those of another distinct culture (based on Sakai 1997a/1997b).

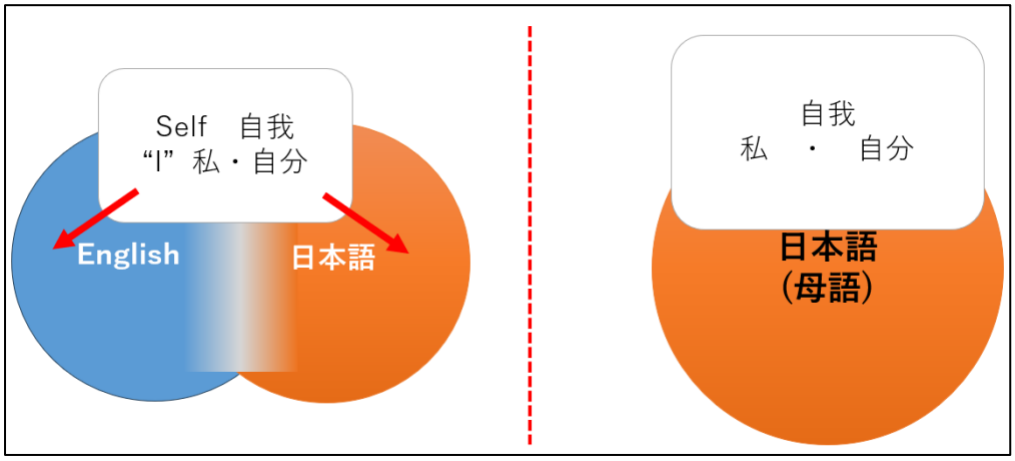

Figure 4: Symmetrical thinking and its limits (2). This figure illustrates the way in which a desire to mirror an “authentic” subject can lead to a conflict in identification in bilingual subjects.

Expression of (Linguistic) Identity in Arthur Binard’s Japanese Poetry

In this section, I will analyze two poems from Binard’s debut collection, one which seems to affirm the primacy of Binard’s American roots (hence placing him in the additive model illustrated above), and another which contrastingly suggests the primacy that the Japanese language has for him as a writer of poetry in Japanese—which I consider to be a common point with Levy, and evidence that Binard too, despite seeming to transcend conflicts of linguistic identity, also faces similar concerns.

As noted above, Binard has actually translated his own Japanese poetry into English. However, the subsequent discussion will primarily draw from my own translations, conducted before I had been able to access Binard's versions, as they are also coloured by my interpretation and are syntactically closer to the Japanese originals which are my primary object of study. I will refer to Binard's published translations as necessary, especially in cases where they diverge from either the original or my translation, and I also referred to them in improving my own.

The first poem I would like to introduce is perhaps the one which engages most directly with the question of identity, actually referring to the concept explicitly. It is titled "Tag" (in the original "タッグ"; also translated "Tag" in Binard's translation), and in it, a T-shirt is used by the poet-narrator "I" (boku) as a metaphor to reflect on his own identity. The following is my own translation of the poem into English:

The T-shirt my mother sent me from Detroit
back when I was living in Milan
together, I think, with some peanut butter
I was wearing it today in Ikebukuro
when lost in thought my fingers reached the tag brushing my neck
as I fiddled
it fell off.

On close inspection, this 100% cotton T-shirt
had been all along Macanese?

Worn out from queue after queue of customs control
cycle after cycle of laundry at last

freed from its "MADE IN" identity.

I've been fiddling with my own "tag"
for quite some time now.
Just when I think it's fallen off
it pops its head back up.

Speaking of which, as it's just about done off with

I'd better call my mother—have her send me some more peanut butter. (Binard 2000, 16-17)

The T-shirt is liberated from the "MADE IN" tag connected to the collar, hinting at the superficiality of identities that are based simply on place of birth, especially in the case of products mass produced for distribution worldwide. However, the poet himself, in the final instance, does not want to be liberated from his own "made in" identity. On the contrary, when he feels it becoming weak, he makes an appeal to his mother to help him revive it. Here, the providing-mother image is associated with peanut butter, a typical American symbol.

Regarding the translation, other than a few Britishisms, the above translation is mostly the same as Binard's published version, which has just a few alterations and additions, presumably made for aesthetic, stylistic and cultural reasons. For example, his translation describes the peanut butter arriving in a "care package" (Binard 2002, 24), a cultural reference that would perhaps be lost on a Japanese reader, and he also renders the final two lines more implicitly: "But, now that I think of it, / I'm nearly out of peanut butter again." (Binard 2002, 25). Even without explicitly voicing his intention to call his mother, the direction of the poet's thought process is clear. Alerted to the precarity of identity in the age of contemporary globalization, he makes the conscious decision to reaffirm his own via his familial connection to American culture. While it is not written explicitly so, the fact that the object of this ceremony, peanut butter, is a loan word from English in Japanese (*pīnattsu batā*), together with use of the word "identity", rendered in the less-common, nonextended phoneticization "*aidentiti*", which is closer to "authentic" English than the more common, elongated "*aidentitī*", not to mention the title of the poem, also an English word, enables one to read a metacommentary about the poet also recognizing the primacy of his mother tongue.

The second poem I will consider presents a more complex relation to cultural norms. It is titled "Lines" (original "線"; in Binard's rendition, "Walking the Line"), and depicts an everyday trip to buy some tofu, transformed into a reflection on the changing landscape of the Japanese city. Below is my translation into English:

Leading up from the side of the playground, there's a gently sloping road that has a sake shop on the right and a futon shop on the left, followed by a shop selling goldfish, which then splits into two smaller streets at the corner of a tofu shop; a road of just three metres or so that I often walk along.

Today, feeling like a block of silken tofu for my lunch, off I went with my tupperware box, only to find that some white lines had been drawn onto the road some fifty or so centimetres from the curb of either side.

Sandwiched between a jostle of shops, houses and apartments

this belt of jet-black asphalt

had its very own *infinity*

Now I'm on the left

the right side of the road, with its freshly painted boundary line, on my right
even if I turn around and put it on my left

I know exactly where I'm standing

I walked home like I was walking a tightrope, one step after the other upon the thick white line as it reflected the light of the midday sun.

Had traffic increased? Either way, I'll surely get used to the clear separation of walk-way—drive-way—walk-way, until one day I come to think nothing of it at all. But—

Not on *my way*: this road I've been walking all my life

that's just as wide as I am

on it I don't want to draw any lines

I think to myself, as I liberally dribble some soy-sauce onto a block of pure white tofu. (Binard 2000, 14-15)

In this poem, the narrator treads a familiar path; a road he often walks along. While previously, it had no markings, it has now been clearly marked with white lines to show the areas suitable for vehicles and pedestrians (see Image 1). The narrator seems to have preferred the road in its previous state. The new road markings could be interpreted as a metaphor for the modern, globalized world that does not leave any room for ambiguity: everybody has a distinct place/identity and is expected to act in line with it. The dichotomy of "left" and "right", and the interchangeability of the two, may also be interpreted as a commentary on the expectation that we take a clear political stance on whatever issue is topical, superficial though that posturing might be.

Interestingly, in Binard's rendition the narrator actually crosses over from one side to the other: "Now, with fresh lines left and right, no matter which / side of which I walk, my position's glaringly defined." (Binard 2002, 23). Binard's original Japanese poem simply states: "whether I put the freshly painted right-side boundary on my right / or my left" (*migi no nuritate no kyōkai wo migi ni shi / hidari ni shitemitemo*). The narrator's act of "putting" the boundary alternately on his left and right is vague, and was not an easy image to translate into English. Indeed, it demonstrates the ambiguity of the Japanese language vis-à-vis English, a reminder that this poem was very much written in Japanese, and also suggestive of the kind of Japanese that Binard wants to write as a poet: language that contains an element of ambiguity, just like the unmarked road the protagonist nostalgically remembers in this poem.

Image 1: "Photo of Empty Street Between Buildings". By vitalina 2020.

Near the end of the poem, the narrator reflects on his own journey through life, and his determination not to "draw any lines on it" ("*sen wo hikazu ni ikitai*"), or in Binard's translation, "I hope / to go it without drawing lines" (Binard 2002, 23), in other words to remain free to act the way he wants to. However, this determination is betrayed by the final line of the poem. The soy-sauce that the narrator "liberally dribbles" ("*tappuri to* […] *tarasu*") on his tofu is symbolic of Japan just like peanut butter is symbolic of the U.S.A.—while not a unique cultural export of the country, it is still associated with Japan for many, particularly in the western world. In other words, this final line can be read as a metaphor for the poet's own creation of poetry, the white block of tofu a metaphor for a piece of paper yet to be written upon, or indeed, the white page upon which this poem has been printed. It demonstrates an awareness that, much as the

narrator might wish to be truly free and independent, the cultural specificity of the writing (the soy-sauce) shows that it is not free, but subordinate, or "subject to" culture.

It is worth noting that this interpretation is not the only one possible. An alternative reading could interpret the pouring of soy-sauce onto the tofu as a way of the narrator reasserting his independence, imaginatively blackening out the white lines that pressure him to conform (I am indebted to a student for this reading). I would argue that this interpretation could still be read as a metaphor for the poet's writing in Japanese, although one which suggests greater agency. Nevertheless, the idea that the actions in the final line contradict the poet's freedom-seeking thought process detailed immediately prior is also suggested by the grammatical construct "*sō omoinagara*" (while/despite thinking so), which is rendered even more explicitly in Binard's translation, in which it is rendered: "or so I think" (Binard 2002, 23).

In contrast to "Tag", with its heavy usage of loan words from English, the setting of "Lines" and the language used to describe it demonstrates the significant degree to which the narrator has already become assimilated with day-to-day Japanese culture and life: not only does he have a regular tofu shop that he frequents, but his phrasing of "a block of silken [tofu] for lunch today" ("*kyō, hirumeshi ni kinugoshi wo*") also demonstrates his level of familiarity, through the casual "*hirumeshi*" (lunch) and self-explanatory "*kinugoshi*" (silken [tofu]), written in a mixture of rather native-sounding hiragana and katakana ("きょう、ひるめしにキヌゴシを"). These features of the poem also act as a reminder of the poet's need to conform to established literary forms, allowing one to associate the title "Lines" with the fact that, being in Japanese, the words are printed (and were presumably written) vertically, i.e. *in line* with established conventions.

While not explicitly a poem about language, read as a metaphor for Binard's creation of poetry in Japanese, the poem seems to suggest that, as with Levy, for Binard, the fact that he is writing or creating poetry *in Japanese* is a matter of primary importance, and it is also a matter accompanied by a process of self-reflection; in one case, being drawn to reaffirm the primacy of his origins, and in the other, having to accept the degree of his assimilation into Japanese culture and the transformation that has been effected upon his identity. He is a writer *of* Japanese, not simply a writer who happens to write using the language.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have primarily considered the question of how Levy and Binard identify with language as writers of Japanese. While this study has not significantly analyzed Levy's literary production, I have tried to demonstrate how, despite a real difference in nuance, the transcendence over linguistic identity and the rejection of an "exclusionary identity" that are articulated by Binard in spoken statements and essay-form do not necessarily hold up when cross-examined with his poetry, as I have interpreted it here. Just like Levy, Binard too depicts the self as being subject to language, and both suggest that as writers of Japanese, they are to a greater or lesser extent subject to the norms of the Japanese language and the traditions of literary production within it. Reading works by both authors, it is clear that neither exclusively

"live" inside a single language, but rather use language to create literary depictions of their respective selves, using language and living their lives, which hints at the existence of a self or identity that exists before language, and therefore has the potential to identify with a plurality of languages and cultures. However, both writers also suggest the primacy of language in the way we express ourselves to the world and those around us. Both were raised as native speakers of English before acquiring new identities as writers of Japanese. The message contained in their writing, as I have interpreted it here, might prompt us to think about identity formation and transformation in relation to language learning and teaching in a more critical, conscious way.

It goes without saying that there is a distinction to be made between cases like the two writers considered here, and that of those in the semi-reversed situation of being native speakers of Japanese who are learning the English language, not within the context of intentional assimilation with, say, transatlantic Anglophone culture, but rather as a means of acquiring skills for international communication more broadly defined. But even in the latter case, the acquisition of language still means a reconfiguring of one's identity and subjectivity, an issue that does not necessarily gain sufficient attention among educators today. While the issue of symmetrical thought and mirroring illustrated above is surely less of an issue, or theoretically should be, when the English-speaking international community is conceived as a non-aggregate, diverse and fluctuating entity, it is still an issue nonetheless, for that entity is far from being culturally anonymous or benign.

Levy and Binard's intensive self-reflection and varied expression of their identification with and through language serve as a reminder of the commitment that establishing and maintaining a connection with a specific language requires, and the internal conflict that it may lead one to grapple with, but they are also testament to our potential as human beings to grow and transform through the process, enriching ourselves and the world we live in. Their writings might help us to approach language acquisition with our eyes wider open and with us being better informed about the size of the challenge lying before us.

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