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Preprint · September 2020

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DOI 10.1007/978-3-030-67825-8 This is a pre-copy-editing manuscript for general preview.

Title: Connecting the personal to the collective: The *haafu aruaru* (things that happen to racially/ethnically ‘mixed’ people) narratives on Twitter

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Abstract

Despite the persistent stereotypes and marginalization in the Japanese society, voices of *haafu* (‘mixed race/ethnicity’) individuals are said to have become more available than ever through social media (Shimoji 2018). This chapter explores how *haafu* individuals narrate their individual experience on Twitter, under the hashtag ‘*haafu aruaru* (things that happen to people of mixed race/ethnicity)’. Specifically, it analyzes dialogic quotes of microaggressive interactions, using the notion of ‘small talk’ (Georgakopoulou 2015). The individuals share a specialized way of talk, which is the elimination of details of time, space, and interlocutor, and their own ethnicity. Meanwhile, the ways their emotions and opinions are expressed remain varied, allowing individuals to express different degrees of evaluation. Some of the findings resonate with previous studies of hashtags in English-speaking countries.

Keywords:

Japanese, narrative, mixed race, social networking services (SNS), computer mediated communication (CMC), media activism, microaggression

1. Introduction

In February 2020ⁱ, a group of undergraduate students organized and publicized an event, initially entitled “*anata wa nihonjin nan paa sento? Let’s “kon-japa” Project: Hori jun san to issho ni 2030 nen no nihonjin o kangaeru* (How many percent Japanese are you? “Let’s Mix-

Japan” Project: Thinking about Japanese people of year 2030 with Mr. Jun Hori). They also circulated a link to an ethically misconducted online survey, which included questions of what the respondents thought of people who has a non-Japanese parent. The event title and the survey ‘flamed’ⁱⁱ on Twitter, shocking and infuriating many people. Even worse, the protest on SNS was subsequently met with the self-justification of the professor responsible for this seminar, who unapologetically tweeted that this flaming was planned as to ‘wake people up’, as he believed that discussion in this ‘taboo’ issue in the Japanese society had been absent. The professor also justified his students’ motives to break the silence and to move things forward, and tweeted that the hurt caused on certain groups of people in the process as planned and inevitable for discussion.

While the professor above regarded the issue as underdiscussed in the society, people concerned felt that discussions and discourses on this issue had been more visible and accessible than ever. According to Shimoji (2018:247), the experiences of discrimination that were previously invisible are more visible on SNS as a media content today. One evidence of this is the popularity of hashtag or phrase ‘*haafu aruaru*’, which I loosely translate here as “things that happen to racially/ethnically ‘mixed’ people”. Shimoji describes the Japanese hashtag *haafu aruaru* as a ‘media activism’ of *haafu* individuals (2018:247).

Many of social activist movements take a form of hashtag activism, where narrative is considered central (Yang 2016). The retweets and replies, which are translated as endorsement, support, and reactions from other users, create a momentum online. Known Twitter hashtag activisms and protests in Japan include the #Kutoo movementⁱⁱⁱ, which protested gendered ideology of workplaces that force women to wear shoes with heels, collecting 18,800 online signatures to be submitted to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare. Meanwhile, the hashtag *haafu aruaru* appears to function differently from such popular social movements, even when they may involve experiences of marginalization.

This chapter explores how tweets with *haafu aruaru* hashtags narrate experiences of microaggression, and is organized as follows. Section 2 provides further information on discussions on narratives on Twitter and the *haafu* population. Section 3 provides how *aruaru* construction works in spoken discourse and on SNS as a meme or a genre. Section 4 provides methodology on Twitter data collection, followed by section 5 which provides examples and analyses of *haafu aruaru* tweets. The discussion and conclusions are in the last section, Section 6.

2. Background information

2.1 The haafu population in Japan

The term *haafu*, etymologically originating from the English word ‘half’, generally refers to a person who has a Japanese and a non-Japanese parent. Various terms that refer to people of ‘mixed race’ category have been available for more than a century, such as *konketsu* (mixed blood), *daburu* (‘double’), and *mikkusu* (‘mix’) (Okamura 2016). These terms were used for different sociohistorical purposes and ideological commitments in how they would like to call themselves (Okamura 2013, 2016; Shimoji 2018). Where the term *haafu* is concerned, the emergence and popularity of online *haafu* groups seem to have further diluted the negative stereotype which contrasted ‘half’ with ‘whole’ (Shimoji 2018). The popularity of the term *haafu* is also evident on Twitter. While tweets with *haafu aruaru* amounted to thousands, those with other related terms were almost non-existent.

Although common mediatized stereotypes of *haafu* are those of ‘mixed race’ with Euroamericans which were more represented in earlier research (Murphy-Shigematsu 2002, Kamada 2005), *haafu* is used for and by people of mixed heritage of all ethnicities. These include those with Korean or Chinese heritage, who may not share the ‘mixed race’ issues in terms of their physical appearance and are in fact far larger in number than *haafu* of other

ethnicities. Those who may identify themselves as *haafu* vary in terms of historical political situation, family situation, racial appearance, birthplace, nationality, linguistic competence, educational, socioeconomic, and occupational background (Shimoji 2018:19).

Reflecting the diversity and marginality of those who may call themselves *haafu*, many online *haafu* groups are more inclusive than the stereotyped representation of *haafu*. Before the popularity of Twitter, large online *haafu* groups emerged on *mixi*, previously the most popular SNS in Japan. Individuals joined these groups, interacted on discussion boards, and joined their offline events to meet. Many found joy and consolation in meeting other *haafu* individuals whom they would have not met otherwise (Evanoff 2010). Many of these groups were inclusive in that they did not specify their ethnic or historical background (Evanoff 2010). This inclusivity is also evident in the independently screened documentary film “Hafu: The Mixed-Race Experience in Japan” (2013), which filmed some of its activities and interviewed individuals with different backgrounds.

Few *haafu* individuals experience issues in terms of citizenship or civil rights in Japanese society, since Japanese nationality is granted if either parent^{iv} registered is a Japanese national. However, many feel marginalized through racialization and stereotypes both on media and in everyday interactions (Iwabuchi 2014, Keane 2019a), mentioned in almost all studies on *haafu*. These everyday interactions increase the feeling of marginalization, invoking pain or anger of concerned individuals. Meanwhile, as a minority, it had been difficult for *haafu* individuals to speak up. These interactions may not sound racist, discriminatory, or offensive, and in some cases people claim they are being respectful of the differences. Such kind of marginalizing and disempowering interactions are technically called *microaggressions*, which are defined as ‘derogatory slights or insults directed at a target person or persons who are members of an oppressed group’ (Torino et al 2019:3). They communicate bias, be it explicit or implicit, intentional or non-intentional.

2.2 Twitter and narrative

Twitter is a social networking service (SNS) for microblogging which is mainly text-based. Due to its 140 character^v limit, narratives on tweets can be succinct. Like in other countries, Twitter is a popular medium in Japan as well, where 70.4% of youth in 20's use it (Watanabe 2019). The participatory culture of SNS encourages users towards more of self-disclosure and emotional, intimate talk than in offline communications (De Fina 2015: 364). This is also true of the Japanese youth, including those who post the *haafu aruaru* tweets, who tend to tweet about themselves more than those older (Kitamura et al. 2016: 74).

Hashtags make tweets more searchable, and connectable with other tweets that have the same hashtags. Hashtags on Twitter have intrigued scholars in terms of social action and communication among users, as well as how they form a community in its own sense (Zappavigna 2015, 2017; Page 2018). Hashtags encourage users to search for other posts that involve the same keywords, as well as join the talk on the topic without directing exchanging message with others who they may not be acquainted with. In this sense, users are engaged in 'searchable talk' (Zappavigna 2015) that connects SNS users in a way that they wouldn't have been possible offline.

Using a hashtag forms an 'ambient affiliation' (Zappavigna 2017). Those who uses the hashtag may not necessarily directly exchange information with other users who posted the same hashtag, nor would they see all the posts with the hashtag, and whether the hashtags were seen by particular individual or not is not visible. While creating ambient affiliation with other users, hashtags can function referentially (provides the topic), evaluatively (highlights the evaluation), or contextually (provides the spatio-temporal context of the message) (Page 2018). In addition, using the same hashtag may not necessarily mean the same evaluative stance towards the hashtag (Page 2018).

While previous studies of hashtags mentioned above looked at relatively shorter tweets, this chapter views narratives on Twitter as ‘small stories’ (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008, Georgakopoulou 2015). Small stories are narratives that were seen as atypical in form or more fragmented and shorter than those that the canonical studies took for granted (e.g. Labov and Waletzky 1972). Small stories studies consider narratives in people’s everyday lives as social actions in people’s everyday lives, by analyzing how people use stories in everyday interactions to create and maintain their own identities (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008). Informed by interactional sociolinguistics, small stories studies take a postmodernist and constructionist view on social identities, by considering narratives as “privileged forms/structures/systems for making sense of self by bringing the coordinates of time, space, and personhood into a unitary frame” (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008: 379). These would apply to narratives of *haafu aruaru* that will be analyzed, which are often longer than previously studied hashtag tweets, while shorter than the traditional narratives.

2.3 *Haafu aruaru* tweets

Haafu aruaru is a hashtag that has been used on Twitter for several years. As explained in the next section, *aruaru* is a colloquial word used to refer to something that occurs frequently. The observation below covers the various functions of *haafu aruaru* hashtags on SNS.

The hashtag that ‘*haafu*’ themselves use in expressing their own identity politics, small everyday experiences and experiences of discrimination etc. is ‘*haafu aruaru*’. By using this hashtag, they share topics that are common and relatable among them, such as family, language, or their own appearance. Also, by using this hashtag, they publicly complain of annoyance, aversion, discomfort, stigmatization by others and so on. (Shimoji 2018: 247, translated by Yamashita)

As shown above, *haafu aruaru* tweets can cover both positive and negative comments about being a *haafu*. Both are considered a part of ‘media activism’ that Shimoji describes. While individuals may ‘publicly complain (*kokuhatsu*)’, not all *haafu aruaru* hashtags are straightforward protests. In fact, *haafu aruaru* is rarely used to directly address and discuss issues that *haafu* face (except Hafelin 2018). For instance, *haafu aruaru* was not used in people’s discussions or reactions around the February 2020 incident. Browsing through *haafu aruaru* tweets, I found that the ‘complaints’ that individuals make were expressed in a form of narrated story of self-disclosure, rather than statements.

Moreover, *haafu aruaru* hashtags do not collect significantly visible amount of engagements or endorsements (‘like’s, responses, or ‘retweet’s), despite being searchable. The timing of *haafu aruaru* posts are sporadic, suggesting that users are not likely intending to create a concerted protest in a short span of time. Most *haafu aruaru* tweets are not a collected reaction to some widely covered event in the society, but are likely reactions to personal events offline, response to what they see on their own Twitter timeline, or reflective musings. In this sense, *haafu aruaru* is a searchable talk that creates its own ambient affiliation where the hashtag provides a topic. Combined with the viewpoint of small stories, narratives in tweets with *haafu aruaru* provide an interesting point in exploring how users, who are likely *haafu* individuals, construct their own positioning and identity on this issue on a public space online.

3. Aruaru as an emphatic response and media meme

3.1 ‘Aruaru’ in spoken discourse

Aruaru can be translated as “That often happens” or “Typical”. It has likely derived from how a speaker would affectively align with what the other speaker narrates, in informal interaction. *Aru* literally means “There is”, but when duplicated in interactions, it would mean

“that happens”. In an example below, Speaker B duplicates the “*aru*”. This shows their emotional involvement and the degree in which s/he agrees with it, and could accompany with nods along with each *aru*.

A: soto ni dete, a, saifu wasureta, tte omotte, isoide modoranakya
naranakute saa...

B: aru aru!

A: I went out, and then I realized, oh I forgot my wallet, so I had to go back
quickly, and...

B: That happens!

Speaker A narrates an unfortunate circumstance where she had to return home to pick her wallet up. In response, Speaker B takes an epistemic stance, saying that she considers Speaker A’s experience as common, suggesting that she has seen or experienced similar things many times enough. Meanwhile, this is also an affective stance which shows Speaker B’s empathy and understanding towards Speaker A. By referring to Speaker A’s experience as common, Speaker B shows her evaluation that Speaker A does not need to feel embarrassed for what Speaker A considers as her shortcomings. This labelling also indicates Speaker B’s evaluation that such incident could have happened to Speaker B as well. Although Speaker B is labelling Speaker A’s experience as common, the intention is to show empathy rather than to minimize or to mock Speaker A’s narrative.

Meanwhile, ‘*aru aru*’ has also become increasingly used in similar instances in a noun form. As a noun, *aruaru* can be followed by a particle or a copula, and the pitch also follows the noun form rather than *aru* duplicated (*aruaru* LHHH, instead of the above “*aru aru*

HLHL”). The noun now semantically means ‘something that happens often enough’.

Even in its noun form, *aruaru* retains its dialogicality and affective alignment. If we switch Speaker B’s utterance in the above sequence to one that uses the noun *aruaru*, Speaker B could respond, for example, “getsuyoo aruaru da ne”, which would mean “Typical, on Monday” (literally “That is a Monday aruaru, isn’t it?”). Like with the previous example, Speaker B would be labelling Speaker A’s incident as something that occurs enough, affectively aligning with Speaker A. Speaker B generalizes and labels what A is experiencing into something that everyone experiences, a common experience. In sum, *aruaru* indexes the experience of the speaker, invoking the empathy and solidarity as those who are familiar with the same experience.

3.2 *Aruaru* on SNS texts

Since, or perhaps along with its nominalization, *aruaru* has come to be used online as a genre, a monologue that addresses frequently and commonly encountered experiences of a particular group of people. Unlike in spoken interaction, on SNS, the one who uses the word *aruaru* is the one who posts, rather than the receptive side. Rather than showing empathy towards the other, the monologic *aruaru* identifies and highlights differences between themselves and others. It became a genre that evokes a curiosity for those outside the group of shared knowledge and experience.

The *aruaru* genre frequently available on Twitter is in the form of ‘NOUN aruaru’, followed or following a statement that describes what is the common occurrence. Often, it comes in a form of a generalization statement in a short monologic form, without an evaluation. The subject of the sentence is usually omitted, because it is a generalizing statement, and the subject is already identified in the *aruaru* part. An actual example with a *haafu aruaru* hashtag is shown below, where there is no personal pronouns nor *haafu* mentioned as subject. In terms of the

content, *aruaru* often involves some sense of self-mockery. They tend to be stories to inform others of the different lives or feelings they experience, often in a way that could possibly be interpreted as a comic tweet. In the below example, the silliness of mistaking one's own self as someone else is suggested.

/ANONYMOUS/

Gaikokujin ga aruiteiru to omottara garasu ni utsutta jibun datta

#haafu aruaru

(I/you/she/he) thought (I/you/she/he) saw a foreigner, when actually it was
(my/your/her/his) own reflection on the glass window.

Aruaru of various groups, activities, or social categories can be found on the Internet, regardless of marginality. While we may find LGBT *aruaru*, the more widely circulated ones relate to a larger group or a more common activity, such as *Kanagawaken aruaru* (Kanagawa prefecture *aruaru*), *ikuji aruaru* (child-raising *aruaru*), *nenmatsu aruaru* (year-end *aruaru*), *yakyu bu aruaru* (school baseball clubs *aruaru*), and so forth. The word has become popularized in the participatory culture, as it functions as a term to refer to the act of one's disclosure and exposure of their own stories, associating it with particular group or occasion. When *aruaru* referring to a group is used, the gist of the narrative is often how an individual of these categories would feel or act differently from what is considered the norm or what the 'rest' would do. Some Twitter accounts are even solely dedicated to tweeting *aruaru* incidents of a particular group, although there are far more one-off *aruaru* tweets by individuals.

4. Methodology

Although there were various ‘ways of talk’ for *haafu aruaru* tweets, this chapter focuses on tweets with direct-speech quotations of a microaggressive interaction. Quotations in interaction are not always acts of providing factual, neutral, word-to-word information of the original speech, but are utterances transformed by the reporter from the original speech, with interactional functions (Tannen 1989). In addition, quotations are creative constructions by the ongoing speaker in the situation where the speech is about to be made, rather than neutral reports of incidents (Tannen 1989). The quotations may differ in terms of linguistic forms, vocabulary, sentence structures, or the style/register. In terms of information, some may be discarded, transformed, or even created and added by the reporter. The choice of direct speech in reporting experiences provides a way to intensify certain narrative events, warding off indifferent stances to the reported talk (Labov 1972:396), and this may also hold true on Twitter. The restriction to microaggressive interaction made it possible to collect tweets that could potentially be interpreted as protestive, rather than positive, comic, or more ambiguous tweets.

The use of a particular hashtag or keyword on SNS, in this case the mentioning of *haafu aruaru*, does not occur frequently enough, across users or even within one user. *Haafu aruaru* tweets occupy a very small space and time in users’ SNS synchronic and diachronic engagement. I have searched and saved all tweets between 2012 and 2019 that included the term *haafu aruaru*, with or without hashtag, that were publicly available in January 2020. These tweets amounted to thousands, including those that copy and paste the same text. I chose to examine tweets that use a dialogue in their narrative, since quotes of dialogues did not seem to occur as often in other *aruaru* tweets which were monologic, as shown in the previous section .

The three examples I will provide are from different users and different years, therefore there is less chance that the users tweeted in response to each other. Although they were viewable to public, being quoted on print and being analyzed on scholarly research would not have been

the intention of the users. To make the tweets less retrievable and recognizable, I have omitted the date and time of the tweet, and changed the users' names^{vi} to those that would evoke similar social identities to readers. In addition, the Romanized transliteration on this chapter causally encrypted some parts to make them less retrievable, as it did not indicate which parts were originally written in hiragana, kanji, or roman characters.

5. Data

Haafu aruaru tweets that had direct quotations of microaggressions often shared the following similarities in ways of talk. Firstly, *haafu aruaru* tweets omitted their own ethnic background that would have been mentioned in the actual spoken dialogue. Secondly, many *haafu aruaru* tweets omitted who or any other detail on who the other speaker was, or when and where the incident happened. They did not even write 'a friend of mine' or 'a friend'. Thirdly, their feelings or opinions expressed were in their own words rather than summarizing it to simple objective words such as 'upset' or 'sad', that would have sounded more generalized as something that commonly occur to a particular group of people.

The following is an example of such tweet. Unakoowa uses first person pronoun at line 05, signaling that it is a story of an individual, yet Unakoowa's ethnic origin is anonymized in the narrative.

Example 1

Unakoowa(teifujoo) [1 retweet, 2 likes]

01 #haafuaruaru

02 “%% go shabereru?”

03 “muri ^_^”

04 “%% no ii sutairu toka kao tsuki shiteru yo ne”

05 “gomen, watashi, nihon gawa no kao dashi, sutairu wa warui shi, kankei nai”

[“%%” was originally two black circles in Japanese font set.]

01 #haafuaruaru

02 “Do you speak %% language?”

03 “Impossible ^_^”

04 “You’ve got that good figure and looks from your %% heritage”

05 “Sorry, I take after the Japanese side for my looks, and have bad figure, so it isn’t related”

Unakoowa starts the tweet with *haafu aruaru*, which seems a heading given to this short exchange. In lines 02 and 04, Unakoowa uses %%^{vii} instead of the name of a country/ethnicity. All quotations are without person’s names, and the other interlocutor is not described or defined in any way. There is no reference to time, location, or frequency of this conversation.

In the first question-answer pair (lines 02 and 03), the other person asks Unakoowa whether Unakoowa can speak the ‘other’ language. Unakoowa straightforwardly responds “Impossible” but accompanies it with a smile emoji. This emoji is ambiguous. While the emoji may be mitigating the straightforward negative response by the juxtaposition to “impossible”, it may also be expressing awkwardness. Unakoowa could have used emojis or emoticons that look more exaggeratedly happy or thrilled than this one, just as most young people would do, if the intention was to express positive emotions.

At lines 04-05, Unakoowa’s reaction is stronger. The other speaker comments on Unakoowa’s appearance, associating it with Unakoowa’s non-Japanese origin. Unakoowa negates this statement by “gomen (sorry)” in line 05, which also is a mitigation device in disagreeing with the other person. Unakoowa claims that Unakoowa does not take after the

non-Japanese ‘side’, that Unakoowa does not have good figure. By saying “*kankei nai* (not related)”, Unakoowa further claims that Unakoowa’s appearance and Unakoowa’s non-Japanese origin are not related. The amount of information provided—Unakoowa negates both the “face” and the “figure” one by one, and straightforwardly claims “not related” is rather a bold statement, despite some mitigated effect in the first word “*gomen*”. There are no emoticons or emojis either.

The following example, whose structure is very similar to the previous one, has a personal comment outside the dialogue that expresses anger and frustration. Like in example 1, the non-Japanese origin is indicated in %%, rather than written out.

Example 2

[Junnosuke]

01 Nee! Dokotono haafu nano?

02 %%%#!

03 Eh!? Jaa , %%% go hanashite mite!!

04

05 Koo iuno ga ichiban uzai. Dareshimo hanaseru wake nai jan.

06 #haafuaruaru

01 Hey! Which country are you ‘haafu’ of?

02 Of %%% (country)!

03 What!? Then, could you say something in %%%% language?

04

05 Such kind is the most annoying. (You) should know that not everyone can speak it.

06 #haafuaruaru

In response to a question asking Junnosuke's origin at line 01, Junnosuke gives a straightforward answer (line 02) with an exclamation mark that expresses a positive engagement towards the question. However, the quote ends after the other interlocutor asks Junnosuke to speak in the non-Japanese language (line 03), without supplying Junnosuke's response. The blank line at line 04 may indicate his silence, reluctance to comply, or uneasiness towards this question in the actual interaction. It may also be a meta-textual signal which separates the quote and his evaluation.

After this blank line, Junnosuke expresses his annoyance (line 05). Junnosuke calls such interaction (or someone who says such things, the referent can be either), as annoying (*uzai*) with a superlative (*ichiban* – “the most” or “number one”). There are no epistemic verbs and the evaluation is not mitigated in any way. These show strong conviction and negative affect towards the question. The word *koiuno* (such) suggests that it is not a one-off incident; that there have been similar incidents before. The second sentence in the same line states that “not everyone can speak the language”, and the other person should have known better, the

evaluation (Labov and Waletzky 1972) of the story.

Haafu aruaru with a hashtag is found at the end of the tweet (line 06). Although the position of *haafu aruaru* is different from example 1, the function is very similar – it gives a title or a label to this small story. Rather than leaving it an individual tweet of a personal experience, Junnosuke hashtagged it with *haafu aruaru*, while withholding information on time, location, speaker, frequency, and ethnicity that is related to this particular experience.

In Example 3 below, Dalya expresses her wish to do (could mean either “organize” or “join”) a *haafu-kai* (-*kai* can be used to anything, from casual to formal meeting, parties, talk over tea/coffee, meals, going out events, etc.). This is in direct speech with an excited tone, as indicated by the lengthened vowel at the end of the sentence, two exclamation marks, and a heart emoticon.

Example 3

Dalya [1 retweet, 5 likes]

01 “haafu kai yaritaaai!! [heart]”

02 tte itta ra,

03 “uchi gunma to nagoya no haafu dayo!”

04 tte iwareta.. un.. nanka..

05 arigato gozaimasu. warawara

06 #haafuaruaru

01 “I wanna do a haafu meeting [heart]”

02 I said that, then,

03 “I’m half Gunma and half Nagoya!”

04 (she) said to me so.. Um.. well..

05 Thank you very much. *laughs*

06 #haafuaruaru

Dalya turns into the narrator mode at line 02, and at line 03, she gives a direct quotation of the other person, presumably her friend who was present in this interaction. The friend says that she is a *haafu gunma* (Gunma prefecture, Japan) and *haafu nagoya* (Nagoya city of Aichi prefecture, Japan), and thus eligible as a *haafu*. Dalya’s discouragement and disengagement towards this utterance is seen in line 04. She uses doubled full stops after every word, as well as the fillers indicating hesitation such as “*un*” and “*nanka*”, which are fillers used when searching for what to say. As seen in example 2, these parts are not in quotation marks, which show that they are rather her feelings that were not voiced in the spoken interaction.

Changing lines again, she suddenly shifts her style (line 05). Still without quotation marks, she writes “Thank you very much”. The hesitating doubled full stops disappear, and she ends the sentence with a clean full stop. The sudden shift to the *desu/masu* style also indicates she is showing a more ‘disciplined’ and ‘spontaneous’ mode of self (Cook 1996), diverging from an intimate conversational style in the previous line. The “Thank you very much” also pragmatically indicates the end of discussion or conversation, therefore an end to a story. Dalya does not indicate what was problematic about her friend’s utterance, but such an abrupt but formal way of ending this story shows she is emotionally disengaged from the interaction, and avoids confronting or further discussion.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This study showed how *haafu* individuals narrated their individual experiences of microaggression on Twitter, using the already established SNS meme of ‘NOUN *aruaru*’ as a hashtag. The examples showed that by using *haafu aruaru*, individuals were calling one’s own experience as common to *haafu* population, most of whom they may not have been in direct contact before. The individuals connect their personal experience to that of the collective *haafu* population in a specialized way of talk, which was shared across the ambient affiliation created by the hashtag. In the dialogic quotes of microaggression, *haafu* individuals deleted the references to time and space in the narrative. In addition, the tweets decontextualized their experience further by omitting the details of their own ethnicity and the interlocutor from their narratives.

The omission of one’s own ethnicity from the narrative is worth noting in terms of *haafu* individuals’ self-identification. It can be interpreted as an attempt to connect to the larger *haafu* community rather than to specific ethnic groups or *haafu* groups of specific ethnic heritage. The elimination of ethnicity resonates with how *haafu* individuals in Japan have tried to self-identify and connect with each other previously on social media. I have mentioned that *haafu* individuals have tried to connect with each other regardless of specific ethnic origins on *mixi* (Evanoff 2010).

While *aruaru* hashtags generalize experiences, it is debatable whether they will eliminate and generalize individual opinions and emotions to converge into a collective emotion. The three examples of tweets conveyed the individuals’ negative evaluation towards microaggressive comments, although they maintained differences in how protestive they were as well as how they express their emotions. For instance, examples 1 and 2 were more protestive than example 3. This finding reminds Page (2018)’s findings that evaluations may differ even when using the same hashtag. Their subtle and nuanced evaluations expressed in narrated discourse are

incongruent and contrastive with the impersonal omission of the contextual details of the story, including their ethnicity.

The longer and sporadic timespan of this hashtag and the shared ways of talk suggest that *haafu* individuals use *haafu aruaru* hashtag as a reference point, that can be reached regardless of time, space, or the ethnicity of the user. While other SNS such as *mixi* involved moderator-approved membership for group members, individuals can connect and relate to the ambient affiliation that the hashtag and their narratives create. The findings provide further opportunities to investigate how individuals may claim a particular identity on SNS through small stories.

Meanwhile, the hashtag *haafu aruaru* is used to highlight common experiences, but not necessarily to gather attention of users to turn the tweets into a concerted action of protest. Despite the potential to express individual opinions, *haafu aruaru* is less commonly used to address the problem, to discuss, or to form a concerted protest, at least up to the time of writing. It is possible that the dialogic and empathic origins of *aruaru*, as explained in section 3, prevented such possibilities. The way *aruaru* in general is consumed as an entertaining meme on SNS may also contribute to this.

This study provided a stepping stone to sociolinguistic investigation of narrative practices on SNS in Japanese, by using *aruaru* as an entry point in investigating the relation between individuals' narratives and social groups. Because generalization is embedded in the word *aruaru*, similar ways of talk may be found in other *aruaru* tweets beyond *haafu* individuals. In addition, because the popularity of *aruaru* meme is based on exploitation of differences between self and others, investigation of *aruaru* uses on SNS can stretch beyond *haafu* individuals as well as beyond those who are disempowered and marginalized. These may challenge discourses that the Japanese society values similarity with others.

Where issues with *haafu* individuals, representations, and social media are concerned, some

sociological studies that investigated related practices beyond narrative texts are available. Keane investigated how *haafu* individuals have repertoires of performed narratives of their *haafu* experiences at hand to manage microaggressive encounters offline (2019a), and how some *haafu individuals* create their own reference point on YouTube (Keane 2019b). I anticipate that future investigations would collaborate with such studies, not only for scholarly explorations into how marginalized individuals construct and negotiate their identities through linguistic practices in Japan, but also for the elimination of microaggressive encounters, making the voices of the marginalized heard and respected online and offline.

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ⁱ I have a firsthand account of this incident, as I participated in the discussions, SNS reactions, and actually writing to the University President, though I cannot explain this in full due to shortage of space. The University President publicly apologized for the misconducted survey in press conference. As of the time of writing, the professor in question has not made a formal apology. Some web articles are available that cover parts of the incident are available.

The Asahi Shimbun ‘University sorry for ‘insensitive’ survey on who is deemed Japanese’ 18th February, 2020

<http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/13138101>

Keane, Julian ‘Haafu, daburu, nihonjin... “jun/kon japa” ibento meishoo henkoo o ukete’ [Haafu, Daburu, Japanese... After the name change of the “Pure/Mix Japa” event] <https://wezz-y.com/archives/72228>

ii To ‘flame’ on SNS means that the tweet or the action became notorious, invoking a lot of users’ attention and criticisms. When a tweet ‘flames’, thousands of comments and retweets (sharing of the tweet or the action) follow, inciting more attention. Various other media (TV broadcasting services, newspapers, magazines, web articles) pick up issues that ‘flame’ on Twitter, resulting in the incident circulating wider.

iii #Kutoo movement was covered widely by Japanese and foreign media.

‘Haihiiru kyoosei yamete “#KuToo undo” Sekai ga kyokan’ [Stop forcing to wear high heel shoes: “#KuToo movement” gains empathy across the globe] (6th June 2019, Asahi Shimbun Digital)

<https://www.asahi.com/articles/ASM663D3LM66UHBI00G.html>

‘The Japanese Rebel Who’s Fighting the Tyranny of High Heels’ (December 10th 2019, The New York Times)

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/10/world/asia/japan-kutoo-high-heels.html>

iv Until 1984, Japanese nationality was only given to children whose father is a Japanese national, and was denied for children with Japanese mother and non-Japanese father.

v In 2017, the character limit has extended to 280 characters for languages other than Japanese, Korean, and Chinese.

vi However, the names mentioned in this chapter are solely the names that each user had when I conducted the search in 2020. Names can be changed frequently, and the users may have had a different name when they tweeted those texts mentioned in this chapter.

vii Originally, these two %% were two full-width circle characters that are commonly used in Japanese to anonymize (such as ‘X nationality’ or ‘Ms. A’), to encrypt offensive words by changing some characters in the word like asterisks in English (such as ‘f*ck’), or to avoid being found by word-search. The % in example 2 also were full-width circle characters.