The Use of Japanese Words *Hito*, *Hitobito*, and *Hitotachi* in L1 and L2 Written Compositions

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Abstract

The paper aims to tackle two neglected issues in teaching Japanese as a foreign language – the pluralization of nouns and the differentiation of synonyms – by analyzing three Japanese words that correspond to the meaning "people". We examined the usage of these words in compositions written by intermediate-level foreign students and native Japanese speakers that were compiled in the corpus "A Country Easy to Live In." Although these words appear in the sentences of both groups, our analysis reveals that in Japanese, the meanings of singularity and plurality are marked and that distinguishing them poses challenges to students. We also show that the distinction between the plural meaning of "people", expressed by the nouns 人々 *hitobito* and 人達 *hitotachi*, needs to be given more attention in Japanese language teaching.

Keywords: collectivity, foreign language teaching, Japanese noun semantics, plurality, synonyms

Povzetek

Članek obravnava dve zapostavljeni vprašanji pri poučevanju japonščine kot tujega jezika, pluralizacijo samostalnikov in razlikovanje sinonimov, z analizo treh japonskih besed, ki ustrezajo pomenu 'ljudje'. Preučili smo rabo teh besed v sestavkih, ki so jih napisali študenti japonskega jezika na srednji ravni in naravni govorci japonščine, zbranih v korpusu 'Država, v kateri je lahko živeti'. Čeprav se te besede pojavljajo v stavkih obeh skupin, naša analiza razkriva, da sta v japonščini pomena ednine in množine označena ter da njuno razločevanje predstavljata izziv za študente. Prav tako pokažemo, da je treba pri poučevanju japonščine več pozornosti nameniti razlikovanju med množinskim pomenom 'ljudje', ki ga izražata samostalnika 人々 *hitobito* in 人達 *hitotachi*.

Ključne besede: kolektivnost, poučevanje tujega jezika, pomen japonskih samostalnikov, množinskost, sinonimi

1   Introduction

The word 人 *hito* means 'person' or 'people,' while 人達 *hitotachi* and 人々 *hitobito* only mean 'people,' making them synonyms.[1] The difference from the majority of previously analyzed synonym problems lies in the fact that the first word represents a hypernym for a large number of words (人 *hito*: 人達 *hitotachi*, 人々*hitobito*, 人間 *ningen*, 人類 *jinrui*, etc.), while the other two are reserved for only a segment of its broader meaning that refers to the plural – which is generally unmarked in Japanese.

It is commonly stated that Japanese does not grammaticalize number as a category and that a single noun can indicate both singular and plural. Discussions on plurality in Japanese language teaching generally end with this observation. However, if 人 *hito* can mean the same as 人達 *hitotachi* or 人々*hitobito*, and as we will see, this receives almost no attention in Japanese language textbooks, how do students comprehend the difference in number between these words?

The number category in the Japanese language is most thoroughly explored in the field of semantics, particularly in comparison to the English language, which we will touch upon in this study.[2] Our goal is to understand the lexical use of these words and highlight issues in teaching Japanese as a foreign language from the perspectives of lexicology and applied linguistics, utilizing material provided by a corpus of foreign and Japanese students' written short essays on the theme "A Country That Is Easy to Live in" (onwards SUMIYASUIKUNI-corpus; 住 み や す い 国 プ ロ ジ ェ ク ト https://sumiyasui.jpn.org/). For this purpose, 86 compositions by students at an intermediate level of Japanese proficiency from German- and South Slavic-speaking regions, on one side, and Japanese students, on the other, were used. This material illustrates semantic nuances based on the syntactic behavior of the analyzed nouns through the process of acquisition of the

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[1] Note: All translations into English of words and works originally in different languages were done by the author of this paper. The modified Hepburn transcription system is used for Japanese.

[2] In the Serbian and broader regional context of the former Serbo-Croatian linguistic domain, significant contributions to the study of number and gender of nouns designating human beings were made by Milka Ivić (1995; 2006; 2008), whose work has served as inspiration for this research.

Japanese language. Due to its emphasis on the lexicon's semantics revealed in sentence examples, our approach is akin to cognitivism.

Although we do not mention linguistic anthropocentrism as a universal phenomenon, words in different languages do not cover the same semantic space and boundaries of such spaces are determined in relation to other words in the same language, somewhat like countries on a world map whose existence relies on their internal organization and international recognition. The notion that the meaning of a word is influenced not only by its syntactic presence but also by other words it associates with, particularly derivatives and synonyms, is prevalent in cognitive and ethnolinguistic studies in Serbia, primarily due to the influence of the Polish linguistic school (Bartminjski, 2011; Ristić & Lazić Konjik, 2020). According to this approach, 'person' cannot be viewed in the same way as 'apple' for the simple reason that a word is influenced not just by its utterance but also by the lexical network formed by combining words from the same derivational nest and semantic field, which define it in relation to other similar or related words. In this study, we will investigate the relationship between the three aforementioned words.

Therefore, we will examine the current state of L2 Japanese instruction, address the general issue of quantity in the Japanese language, and, finally, present the analyzed corpus and the results of our analysis.

2   Category of number in the instruction of L2 Japanese learners

The words 人 *hito*, 人々 *hitobito*, and 人達 *hitotachi* pose a problem in teaching Japanese as a foreign language for two reasons: firstly, due to issues with plurals and, secondly, because these three words are synonymous. Both issues are notably neglected in the teaching of Japanese as a foreign language, which we will attempt to address here.

There is a natural tendency for elements of one's native language to be unconsciously incorporated into the learning of a foreign language, leading to transfer or language interference (Lado, 1964; Suzuki, 1978, p. 12). The native languages of the students who participated in the essay writing project belong to the Indo-European language family, which has a grammaticalized category of number, unlike Japanese. Therefore, it can be expected that these students will need more explanations or practice

regarding the expression of singular or plural in the Japanese language. However, currently, this is not the case.[3]

Namely, the absence of any reference to the grammatical category of number in Japanese textbooks or grammar books is more of a rule than an exception.   Thus, neither in SHKNG nor in MNN, for example, are the properties of nouns specifically addressed, and the plural is only briefly mentioned at the lexical level. For example, in MNN-SHK1, the suffix 達 *tachi* appears in the 22nd lesson with 私 *watashi* 'I', 私達 *watashitachi* 'we', but it is not stated that this suffix can be used with other words. In SHKNG, 達 *tachi* appears in the third lesson with a note that it is a plural suffix, but without further explanation. Classifiers and numbers are treated as lexical and syntactic units, but the issue of plurality in Japanese is not addressed.

Regarding the grammar of the Japanese language, apart from occasional mentions that, unlike European languages, Japanese nouns do not distinguish between singular and plural forms,[4] the concept of number as a linguistic term is almost entirely neglected. The category of number is mainly mentioned in relation to pronouns (e.g., Makino & Tsutsui, 1999, pp. 28-32). McClain (1981, p. 150), a grammar handbook of Japanese written in English, states that in exceptional cases, plural is indicated by plural suffixes

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[3] For illustration in this study, we utilized textbooks, dictionaries, and grammar books of the Japanese language commonly used for international teaching purposes in countries participating in the SUMIYASUIKUNI-corpus project, Serbia included. (Abbreviations of the titles of the textbooks and dictionaries used here are listed at the end of the text, before the References.) However, our observations are based on a much broader review of materials, where no significant deviation from the findings presented here was noted.

[4] For instance, under the 'noun' (名詞 *meishi*) entry, Matsumura (1971, p. 829) states that "[…] Rather, it must be considered that Japanese nouns lack distinctions of gender, number, and case, in contrast to Indo-European languages." Similarly, Higashinakagawa and Shinonome (2003, p. 24) note: "Japanese nouns do not exhibit distinctions of gender or number as found in Western languages. When it is necessary to clarify that a noun is plural, suffixes may be added, or the same word may be repeated (reduplication) but this method of forming plurals is limited to certain nouns." Additionally, we would like to draw attention to the fact that agreement in number and gender in languages characterized by such features is not always strictly adhered to (for further discussion, see Ivić, 2008, pp. 13-38; Ivić, 1995, p. 105) and "the difference between singular and (non-count) plural [is] not always grammaticalized according to the same principle" (Ivić, 1995, p. 128).

attached to nouns or pronouns or by repetition of the same word but does not pursue the further implications of this.

On the other hand, it can generally be observed that Japanese language textbooks from elementary to intermediate levels do not pay enough attention to potential and actual lexicological issues, especially synonyms. Most textbooks list new words with minimal explanations of their meanings. Examples of usage are limited to those provided in grammar exercises or illustrative dialogues focused on grammar, thus, they are necessarily very restricted both in terms of the number of examples and the types of contexts in which words may appear.

Suzuki (1978) reported similar findings already in the 1970s. However, we estimate that no significant progress in the area has been made since, although the author offers a potential solution by pointing out at translation equivalents and their sourse situations.[5] Therefore, it is not surprising that when students are introduced to a new word, they are often not told that the new word does not completely align with a word in their native language used for translation.[6]

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[5] "For the most part, the traditional method of teaching foreign languages has not been concerned with a consideration of the structural framework of language. It has tended to point out so-called equivalents of individual items (i.e., "This word should be translated this way in this particular context"), even though these equivalents may be applicable in only a few instances. The most typical examples of this approach are, unfortunately, found in dictionaries. If I look up *break* in an English-Japanese dictionary I happen to have handy, I find a list of such Japanese verbs as (1) *kowasu*, (2) *oru*, (3) *yaburu*, (4) *kiru*, etc. Usually, the larger the dictionary, the longer the list, with as many as ten to twenty verbs corresponding in one way or another to *break*. It is no wonder that students become confused. Since each of the Japanese words such as *waru* and *oru* corresponds to *break* only in a very limited way, it is not sufficient to give examples of when correspondence occurs. It is equally necessary to point out when it does not occur. Otherwise, (…), we will not be able to prevent inappropriate generalizations. So far, however, no dictionary has taken this preventive measure" (Suzuki, 1978, pp. 14-15).

[6] Furthermore, this lack of awareness extends to the various levels of meaning inherent in words in their native language, leading them to overlook the need to seek appropriate equivalents for these different nuances. For instance, the Serbian word 'život' (life) corresponds to several Japanese words such as 人生 *jinsei*, 生活 *seikatsu*, 命 *inochi*, etc. However, students often perceive these Japanese words as synonyms due to their equivalence with the same translated term in Serbian (Markovic et al., 2015), thus obscuring the distinctions among them. Consequently, we tend to interpret the term

For example, in the SHKNG vocabulary, the word 人 *hito* appears in the 1st lesson with the meaning 'person,' while the word 人々 *hitobito* only appears in the 25th lesson with the meaning 'people, everybody,' without comparing it to the previously learned word 人 *hito*. In MNN, 人 *hito* is listed in the 5th lesson, and 人々 *hitobito* only appears in the intermediate-level textbook, MNN-CHK, in the fourth lesson with the translation 'people,' appearing, for instance, in the sentence 世界中の人々が平和を願っているのである (p. 47) *Sekaijū no hitobito ga heiwa o negatte iru no de aru* 'People all over the world are wishing for peace.' But it is not mentioned that, for example, the given sentence could also work with 人 *hito* and that it would not introduce a significant difference in meaning. In other words, it is not specified anywhere that the word 人 *hito* also means 'people' and not just a single person or a man, nor is it explained how these two nouns differ. The same also holds for other synonyms.[7]

In Japanese-Japanese dictionaries, definitions for 人 *hito* primarily list words like 人間 *ningen* and 人類 *jinrui* 'humankind/mankind', going through other meanings by the size of the dictionary, with no special focus on the meaning of plurality. This is the case, for example, with KGJT and KJN. First entries under 人 *hito* in the KKSC Japanese-English dictionary, are: "〈人類〉 *jinrui* humankind; man; mankind; human beings; people; humans […]" — including the plural form right at the beginning of the definition alongside the singular. The individual meaning is highlighted in the second place ("2 〈個人〉 *kojin* a person; an individual; a being; a human being […]"[8]), and the

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'synonym' in an expanded sense, encompassing all words that may have the same translated equivalent in the target or native language, thereby creating confusion in the acquisition process. A potential method for addressing this issue of synonyms in the target language through the analysis of online corpora integrated into teaching is illustrated by the example of the words 過程 *katei* and 工程 *kōtei*, both meaning 'process,' in Tričković (2024b). Nevertheless, this issue requires much more attention and exploration.

[7] At the initial learning stage, this simplified approach may be justified. However, it seems that by the intermediate level, it becomes necessary to revisit the acquired vocabulary, particularly focusing on general, abstract nouns rich in meaning. Many of these meanings, being linguistically and culturally conditioned, remain unnoticed without a contrastive analysis with another language (Trickovic, 2024a).

[8] In this context, an interesting meaning is highlighted where the term 人 *hito* corresponds to 自分 *jibun*, i.e., the first-person pronoun.

third entry refers to the plural form of people ("3〈世界の人〉*sekai no hito* people; 〈他の人々〉 *hoka no hitobito* other people; others [...]").[9]

In the KGJT Japanese-Japanese dictionary, the term 人々 *hitobito* is defined solely as ① 多くの人 (大勢の―) *ōku no hito (ōzei no hito)* 'many people'; and ② めいめいの人 (―に行き渡る) *meimei no hito (-ni yukiwataru)* 'each person'. In KJN, the definition is similar but slightly more detailed. In the Japanese-English dictionary KKSC, 人々 *hitobito* is translated as "people" and "each person."

The term 人達 *hitotachi* is not listed in any of these dictionaries.

Based on the entries in the dictionaries, it is evident that the term 人 *hito* encompasses a broader semantic range, with significant variations in meaning, while 人々 *hitobito* is specialized for expressing the plurality of people, which can be understood as either an indivisible plurality (a group as a whole) or a divisible one (the meaning of "each person" implies the possibility of segmenting parts regardless of the actual number of parts).

Neither textbooks nor dictionaries nor grammars available to students provide guidance on when this specification of meaning is necessary, i.e., when 人 *hito* : 人達 *hitotachi* : 人々 *hitobito* can or cannot be used interchangeably as synonyms, and what conditions dictate the exclusion of one of them. (Evidence of their interchangeability is observed in our test sample, which will be discussed in detail later in the analysis, where potential substitution of 人 *hito* : 人達 *hitotachi* : 人々 *hitobito* is indicated in over 30% of instances.)

Furthermore, this matter involves a slightly different phenomenon than merely a question of synonyms. The words 人 *hito*, 人々 *hitobito*, and 人達 *hitotachi* are synonymous due to the absence of the grammatical category of number, and the fact that when the term 人 *hito* is used non-referentially, it denotes a type, and thus, a plurality, thereby equating it with the words 人達 *hitotachi* and 人々 *hitobito*. The question that arises, therefore, is: if the grammatical difference, which is natural to students (as their native languages exhibit number distinctions), is not explicitly emphasized in instructional materials, and the difference in usage between synonymous words is not highlighted, how do learners perceive this distinction and what meanings are evident in their usage of these terms in compositions.

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[9] A very similar correspondence is observed in KKSD as well.

3   Category of number in Japanese

The grammatical category of number in Japanese is based on the semantic or logical category of quantity, representing a crucial element in understanding the world around us as humans. Typically, it is expressed in the dichotomy of singular/plural, while some languages also differentiate dual or paucal (small number) forms. Mingazova et al. (2016, p. 8389-8399) indicate that the noun number category is double-based, distinguishing not only between singularity/duality/plurality but also between segmentation/collective nouns levels, where plurality and collective nouns represent indefinite quantity, while others are definite. Segmentation is sometimes referred to as individuation/individuated reference, while the lack of number marking is termed zero segmentation or number neutralization (Mingazova et al. 2016, p. 8389-8399; Yasutake, 1989, p. 22).

In Japanese, there is generally no grammaticalized category of number, and nouns do not agree with other words in number. However, plurality can lexically be expressed in the following three ways.

1. Through the use of classifiers and numbers.
2. By employing special plural suffixes such as 達 *tachi* and ら *ra*, although their usage is very limited.
3. By duplicating words (Japanese 畳語 *jōgo*), as seen in the case of the word 人々 *hitobito*, which is also a non-productive process.

The question of the use of numbers with classifiers—which places Japanese in the group of classifier languages (Sudo, 2016; Iida, 2021; Erbach et al., 2017)—will not be explored in this paper. Instead, when analyzing the usage in student compositions later in the paper, we will address plural suffixes and nominal reduplications.

The above three methods of expressing plurality in the Japanese language—numerical classifiers, plurality suffixes, and nominal reduplications—highlighted by Yasutake (1989, p. 15) as concepts where animacy, referentiality, and collectivity play important roles—do not coincide with each other. Their non-cooccurrence "points to the essentially semantic nature of these devices" (Yasutake, 1989, p. 17), which is why studies on plurality in Japanese primarily stem from the field of semantics and still have little influence on Japanese language textbooks. Since the subject of our analysis pertains to words indicating human beings, the concept of animacy, as an implicit premise, will not be further examined in this paper. Furthermore, due to the essay's topic involving inhabitants of a

country where living is easy, the use of singular referential usage is not expected. However, we will still need to address the concept of collectivity.

Regarding classifiers and the fact that Japanese is categorized as a classifier language (Yasutake, 1989, p. 16; Erbach et al., 2017, p. 235), it is important to note that its fundamental characteristic is taken to be the lack of distinction between mass and count nouns, which is typical of Indo-European languages. Typically, Japanese is compared in this domain to English, where countable nouns—usually common nouns denoting something that can be counted—and uncountable or mass nouns—which include material and abstract nouns denoting something that cannot be segmented into countable units—are distinguished. Traditionally, it is assumed that "count nouns individuate, but mass nouns do not" (Inagaki & Barner, 2009, p. 112), and they are not differentiated in Japanese without context or specific syntactic indicators (Iida, 2015, p. 64).

While there is evidence suggesting that the division of Japanese nouns does not deviate much from the division into countable and uncountable nouns in English,[10] we are unable to delve deeper into this debate in this paper. However, it is important to note that many Japanese nouns, although they may not necessarily indicate the difference between singular and plural, can do so and can, therefore, be classified as countable or uncountable.

When comparing Japanese nouns with respect to countability, Erbach et al. (2017) observe a distinction between nouns such as 椅子 *isu* 'chair', 郵便物 *yūbinbutsu* 'postal items,' and 雪 *yuki* 'snow,' where 椅子 *isu* is countable while 郵便物 *yūbinbutsu* and 雪 *yuki* are not. In this case, 郵便物 *yūbinbutsu* represents a set, while 雪 *yuki* denotes substances, leading the authors to conclude: "The one difference between e.g., Japanese and English is that, since Japanese has a highly restricted (and even then optional) use of plural morphology, lexically simple Japanese nouns have number neutral extensions (that include entities and sums thereof)" (Erbach et al., 2017, p. 242).

Let us consider the following example. Since both, 人 *hito* and 林檎 *ringo*, given in the cited example below, are common nouns, they share a large number of properties. Therefore, Yasutake's observation that in the

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[10] "Nominal denotations in Japanese are not so different from those in non-classifier languages like English (Sudo, 2016, p. 2)." The existence of the division of nouns in Japanese into mass/count is evidenced through the analysis of classifiers, as discussed in (Iida, 2021).

example "わたしは林檎を食べた。*Watashi wa ringo wo tabeta*" it is difficult to "determine whether '林檎' *ringo* should be translated as singular or plural, and whether it is necessary to use a definite or indefinite article", applies to the noun 人 *hito* as well in many cases. However, this ambiguity is not inherently Japanese, since in Japanese, as is stated at the same source, the statement can be (and usually is) interpreted "as describing the 'type of fruit eaten.' The actual number of apples eaten, whether singular or plural, is considered irrelevant to the speaker's intention" (Yasutake, 1988, pp. 64-65). In other words, in Japanese, it is generally irrelevant whether we are referring to one apple or more. However, the information can still be expressed with an additional word. The noun 人 *hito* thus falls into the category of countable nouns, i.e., nouns that can be associated with a specific number, but its basic meaning is 'human(kind)'.

This optionality in Japanese is considered the key characteristic. Unlike Indo-European languages where the obligatory dichotomy is at the level of singular vs. plural, in Japanese, it is about whether the quantity matters or not, where the second member is marked syntactically or by context, even if it is individuated, i.e., singular.[11] Therefore, while in European languages, singular is unmarked and plural is marked in Japanese, both categories of are marked. ,.

When it comes to indefinite, uncountable plural, there are two ways of expressing it. Multiple entities can form a set known to have a certain number of members, or entities can be viewed as a substance with the same basic characteristics (as we saw previously in the example of 郵便物 *yūbinbutsu* and 雪 *yuki*). Regarding the meaning of a set with a certain number of members, in addition to material and abstract nouns, collective nouns that have a singular form but a plural meaning are also classified as uncountable nouns. Considering the meaning of a set with a certain number of members, nouns such as 両親 *ryōshin* 'parents,' 兄弟 *kyōdai* 'siblings,' 家族 *kazoku* 'family,' etc. should also be considered here, as they always imply defined sets whose members are in a mutual relationship (see the concept of transitive or relational nouns in Ivić (2006, pp. 9-17)).

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[11] "This observation [that the plurality inferences of the reduplicated plural nouns behave exactly like those of English plural nouns] poses a challenge to the theories of plurality inferences that rely on singular nouns, as Japanese simply lacks singular nouns" (Sudo, 2017, p. 27).

According to the logic of European languages, one might think that, compared to the example given earlier, 人 *hito* would belong to the same group as 椅子 *isu* 'chair', unlike 民族 *minzoku* 'nation' or 兄弟 *kyōdai* 'siblings', which would correspond more to 郵便物 *yūbinbutsu* 'postal items', while words like 人間 *ningen* 'human being' or 人類 *jinrui* 'humankind' would correspond to 雪 *yuki* 'snow.' However, this reasoning must consider the previously stated fact: number-neutral extensions include entities and sums (Erbach et al., 2017, p. 242). In other words, on the unmarked side, there is no singular as in European languages, but rather a type, implying some form of collective meaning, which can be numerically segmented as needed. Consequently, 人 *hito*, besides the concept expressed through 椅子 *isu*, can equally correspond to the concepts of 郵便物 *yūbinbutsu* and 雪 *yuki*.

On the other hand, unlike the examples such as 林檎 *ringo* 'apple,' the word 人 *hito* inherently has a lexicalized plural meaning in the nouns 人達 *hitotachi* 'people,' and 人々 *hitobito* 'people.' This points to the existence of two examples of lexical plurality, which have not been sufficiently investigated.

Based on all the above, we conclude that students of the Japanese language have grounds to consider the nouns 人 *hito* (which can denote both singular and plural), 人達 *hitotachi*, and 人々 *hitobito* (which signify plural) as synonymous, which poses a potential usage and acquisition challenge. Through the analysis of sentences with these words from the SUMIYASUIKUNI-corpus and an examination of other words from the same semantic field, we will attempt to determine the extent of this issue.

4   Analysis

4.1 Student composition corpus and the method of analysis

Despite the potential of using L2 learner corpora in language research and foreign language studies (Lee et al., 2018; Noda & Sakoda, 2019; Lee et al., 2021), such investigations are often limited to error analysis. They can also be utilized for other purposes such as the development of multicultural competence (Murata et al., 2022; Trickovic & Miyanoya, 2024) etc.

During the initial analyses of the SUMIYASUIKUNI-corpus, it was noted that the following words frequently appear in the essays of students from Germany and Serbia, as well as native speakers of Japanese: 生活 *seikatsu*, 社会 *shakai*, 国 *kuni*, 条件 *jōken*, 人 *hito*, 人々 *hitobito*, 自分 *jibun*, 大切 *taisetsu*,

and 必要 *hitsuyō* ([Murata et al., 2022](), p. 279). While some of the mentioned words have been analyzed in other papers ([Murata et al., 2024](); [Murata et al., 2023](); [Trickovic, 2024a]()), this time, our attention focuses on the pair 人 *hito* : 人々 *hitobito*, with the addition of the word 人達 *hitotachi*, precisely because both words often appear in the essays.

We analyzed 20 essays from Japanese students and 66 essays from foreign students at an intermediate level of Japanese language proficiency, established on the basis of an initial test (more on the corpus itself in [Murata et al., 2024]()). The corpus includes essays from 20 students from the German-speaking region, while the rest are from the Western Balkans area, whose languages are related and share numerous similarities (Croatia 20, Serbia 19, Slovenia 13, and Bosnia and Herzegovina 4). We treated all essays by Japanese language learners as a single group. After each example, we noted its origin as indicated in the corpus. All compositions are numbered and prefixed with the initials of their respective countries of origin (e.g., BOS for Bosnia and Herzegovina, CRO for Croatia, GER for Germany, JAP for Japan, SLO for Slovenia, SRB for Serbia).

In the analysis of sentences from the essays, we focused on the meanings of the words 人 *hito* and 人々 *hitobito*, as well as the word 人達 *hitotachi*. Other words with similar or related meanings were also not completely excluded from consideration. During the analysis, we did not focus on usage errors but rather attempted to lay the groundwork for future exploration of new questions in the area of understanding numbers in the Japanese language and the need for a different approach to vocabulary when teaching Japanese as a foreign language. For this reason, examples will be presented in their original form with partial (sometimes assumed due to ambiguities) translations of only the highlighted parts (emphasized and underlined by us).

We anticipate that in the sentences produced by foreign Japanese language learners, there will be an overlap of two segmentation systems regarding numerosity: the singular vs. plural dichotomy and number neutral or irrelevant (meaning of type) vs. number relevant. Our aim is to gain better insight into both systems and draw attention to the usage and meaning of the words 人 *hito*, 人々 *hitobito*, and 人達 *hitotachi*, which are not solely visible through the analysis of the Japanese language.

In the 20 compositions produced by Japanese students, the word 人 *hito* was used 31 times, and 人々 *hitobito* was used 17 times. We excluded

examples where the character 人 *hito* was part of other words, such as 人間 *ningen*, 人口 *jinkō*, 日本人 *nihonjin*, etc., although we will refer to some of them during the analysis. The word 人達 *hitotachi* is used only once.

In the 66 compositions by foreign students, the word 人 *hito* was used 148 times, and 人々 *hitobito* was used 69 times, following the same principle. Additionally, 人達 *hitotachi* appeared eight times.

From the excerpted sentences, we sampled 78 examples of usage for verification by native speakers regarding the interchangeability of these terms and the accuracy of their usage, marking acceptability, and better choice as follows: where one of the analyzed words was used in the composition, we provided all three options. The instruction was to put a question mark for uncertain choices, an exclamation mark for preferred ones, cross out the inappropriate ones, and leave all potentially interchangeable choices. Although the results were similar, they were not identical, and both of our tester participants reported being indecisive many times about whether something was acceptable or not.[12] Consider examples (1)-(3):

(1) その人／人達／人々と友達になれば一人じゃなくて、一緒に難しい毎日を乗り越えることができて、性格が強くなって、気分が上がります。 (GER65)

Sono hito / hitotachi / ~~hitobito~~ to tomodachi ni nareba hitori janakute, issho ni muzukashii mainichi o norikoeru koto ga dekite, seikaku ga tsuyoku natte, kibun ga agarimasu.

'If you become friends with those people, you won't be alone.'

(2) 人!／~~人達~~／人々は 1 人では生きていけないので、生活していく中での人付き合いは住みやすさに関与してくると思うからです。(JAP03)

Hito! / ~~Hitotachi~~ / Hitobito wa hitori dewa ikite ikenai node, seikatsu shite iku naka de no hitotsukiai wa sumiyasusa ni kan'yoshite kuru to omou kara desu.

'A person/people cannot live alone.'

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[12] Note: All translations of the sentences are by this paper's author, solely for illustrative purposes, and pertain only to the highlighted portion of the original sentence as relevant to the given analysis.

(3) 住みやすい国はあらゆる種類の人?／人達／人々!がうけ入れるべきです。
（BOS08）

Sumiyasui kuni wa arayuru shurui no hito? / hitotachi / hitobito! ga ukeireru beki desu.

'… should accept all kinds of people.'

　This pilot testing showed the need to repeat the interchangeability test of the words 人 *hito*, 人々 *hitobito*, and 人達 *hitotachi* with a larger number of participants and a slightly differently designed survey, for example, only with examples from native Japanese speakers. Therefore, we will not extensively present the results obtained from this sampling, but will mention some general and significant observations we arrived at.

4.2 The noun 人 *hito*

If we consider only the noun 人 *hito*, we can agree that it primarily conveys information about the kind or type, while the meaning of singular or plural is discerned in relation to other parts of the sentence or based on context, as suggested in the literature. In this sense, it is logical that referential use and the meaning of singular are marked in relation to the non-referential meaning of type. Yasutake (1989, pp. 22-23) states that the referential use of unmarked animate nouns "refers to a single animate being," while non-referential use "simply designates a class of being," which "can be regarded as a case of grammatical depersonification (or in-animation)." This also means that along with referential use, the meaning of singular is rarer and marked, as demonstrated by examples of sentences in student compositions. Namely, although one might expect that in compositions on the topic of a country where living is easy, referential use of the singular word 'person' would be rare, there are very few examples where we questioned whether the meaning might be singular. In those cases, the potential meaning of singular was determined by the rest of the sentence, and similar examples were found in both groups. Consider examples (4)-(9):

(4) 言語で苦労している人が自分だけでない。(JAP01)

Gengo de kurō shite iru hito ga jibun dake de nai.

'I am not the only person struggling.'

(5) これも<u>人によって</u>どの気候帯が合うかは<u>変わってくる</u>と思うが、...
　　（JAP16）

　　Kore mo <u>hito ni yotte</u> dono kikōtai ga au ka wa <u>kawatte kuru</u> to omou ga,...

　　'... it differs depending on a person ..."

(6) 幸せになれる<u>状況も人によって違います</u>。(GER68)

　　Shiawase ni nareru <u>jōkyō mo hito ni yotte chigaimasu</u>.

　　'The situations also differ from person to person.'

(7) 住みやすい国というのは、<u>人によって違うと思います</u>。(CRO09)

　　Sumiyasui kuni to iu no wa, <u>hito ni yotte chigau to omoimasu</u>.

　　'I think that differs from person to person.'

(8) 安全で不安定な<u>国に住みたい人はいません</u>。(BOS08)

　　Anzen de fuantei na <u>kuni ni sumitai hito wa imasen</u>.

　　'There is no one who wouldn't like to live in a ~ country.'

(9) <u>人が住んでいる国は、自分の人生に大きな影響を与えます</u>。(SLO03)

　　<u>Hito ga sunde iru kuni wa, jibun no jinsei ni ōkina eikyō o ataemasu</u>.

　　'The country where one lives has a significant impact on one's life.'

　　In the analyzed examples, the meaning of one person with the classifier, 一人 *hitori*, is more often associated with the idea of independence, isolation from society, or loneliness, rather than merely denoting singularity. The word 一人 *hitori* appears only once in Japanese compositions and eight times in student compositions. Consider examples (10)-(15):

(10) <u>私もその一人です</u>。(BOS05)

　　<u>Watashi mo sono hitori desu</u>.

　　'I am also one of them.'

(11) <u>人は１人では生きていけない</u>ので、生活していく中での人付き合いは住みやすさに関与してくると思うからです。(JAP03)

　　<u>Hito wa hitori dewa ikite ikenai</u> node, seikatsu shite iku naka de no hitotsukiai wa sumiyasusa ni kan'yoshite kuru to omou kara desu.

　　'a person cannot live alone'

(12) まずは、<u>一人の人として生活ができるように</u>仕事をする必要はあります。(GER59)

Mazu wa, <u>hitori no hito toshite seikatsu ga dekiru yō ni</u> shigoto o suru hitsuyō wa arimasu.

'a person to be able to live alone'

(13) <u>その人と友達になれば一人じゃなくて</u>、一緒に難しい毎日を乗り越えることができて、性格が強くなって、気分が上がります。(GER65)

<u>Sono hito to tomodachi ni nareba hitori janakute</u>, issho ni muzukashii mainichi o norikoeru koto ga dekite, seikaku ga tsuyoku natte, kibun ga agarimasu.

'to become a friend with that person and not to be alone'

(14) 家族とか友達がいると自分は<u>世界で一人ではない</u>ことも大変大事だと思います。(SER06)

Kazoku toka tomodachi ga iru to jibun wa <u>sekai de hitori dewa nai</u> koto mo taihen daiji da to omoimasu.

'not to be alone in the world'

(15) 同時に、<u>子供達のグループから</u>肌の色が濃い男の子または女の<u>子の１人分離した</u>ことを見えない。(CRO04)

Dōji ni, <u>kodomo-tachi no gurūpu kara</u> hada no iro ga koi otoko no ko mata wa onna no <u>ko no hitori bunri shita</u> koto o mienai.

'one kid to be separated (from a group of kids)'

Unlike the compositions of Japanese students, some of the compositions of Japanese L2 learners show a clear need to distinguish between the individual and the social and trouble in doing so. This is evident in the use of the words 個人 *kojin* 'an individual', 個人的 *kojinteki* 'personal' (a total of 9 occurrences in student compositions). [13] On the other hand, with the meaning of the individual, as opposed to group, we did not notice the use of the noun 人 *hito*. See examples (16)-(19):

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[13] In any future examination of expressions specifying individuals, such as 個人 *kojin*, 自分(自身) *jibun(jishin)*, and similar terms, it would be beneficial to do so both contrastively and to verify whether these expressions can be used in Japanese as 'emphatically structured determinative expressions,' akin to 'lično' in Serbian (Ivić, 2008, pp. 169-172).

(16) すなわち、<u>個人が自分のアイディアを実現できる</u>国か、人格発達ができる国かにより、人間が暮らしている。(GER60)

Sunawachi, <u>kojin ga jibun no aidia o jitsugen dekiru</u> kuni ka, jinkaku hattatsu ga dekiru kuni ka ni yori, ningen ga kurashite iru.

'a person to be able to express his idea'

(17) このような条件が満たされていると否とにかかわらず、ミクロレベルで、つまり<u>個人的な経験で</u>、住みやすい国の定義が人によって非常に異なっていると思う。(GER55)

Kono yōna jōken ga mitasarete iru to inoto ni kakawarazu, mikuroreberu de, tsumari <u>kojinteki na keiken de</u>, sumiyasui kuni no teigi ga hito ni yotte hijō ni kotonatte iru to omou.

'by a personal experience'

(18) デモクラシーの中で<u>国民の個人</u>は自分の意見で政治に携わることができます。(GER69)

Demokurashī no naka de <u>kokumin no kojin</u> wa jibun no iken de seiji ni tazusawaru koto ga dekimasu.

'a single/each citizen'

(19) 次に、<u>人々は自分自身を個人として認識する</u>だけでなく、皆さんが他の人も彼らの感じも要る物の存在も認識するべきだ。(CRO36)

Tsugi ni, <u>hitobito wa jibun jishin o kojin toshite ninshiki suru</u> dake de naku, minasan ga hoka no hito mo karera no kanji mo iru mono no sonzai mo ninshiki suru beki da.

'people to be conscious of themselves as individuals'

In the analyzed compositions of Japanese students, the word 個人 *kojin* does not appear at all, but 他者 *tasha* or 他人 *tanin* 'another person; others' do. One of them appears in the same sentence as the only occurrence of 人達 *hitotachi*, where その人たち *sono hitotachi* refers to others (他者 *tasha*) and later to 自分たち *jibuntachi* 'themselves,' not to an individual person. See example (20):

(20) 住みやすい国の社会は他者を受け入れ、その人たちが自分たちのコミュニティを形成するだけでなく、一般のメインストリーム社会にも参加できる様々なサポートを提供する主体だと留学生として思う。(JAP01)

Sumiyasui kuni no <u>shakai wa tasha o ukeire, sono hitotachi ga jibun-tachi no komyuniti o keisei suru</u> dake de naku, ippan no meinsutorīmu shakai ni mo sanka dekiru samazama na sapōto o teikyō suru shutai da to ryūgakusei toshite omou.

'society to accept others, so that others can form community of their own'

On the other hand, the word 他者 *tasha* does not appear in the foreign students' compositions, but 他の人 *hokano hito* appears 10 times. Interestingly, among them, three times it is explicitly mentioned in the context of helping another person (helping another person is not limited to these examples), as shown in (21) and (22).

(21) 皆は道を掃除して、仕事をして、<u>他の人に手伝って</u>、いいことをして、そんなことは本当に大切だと思います。(SER30)

Minna wa michi o sōji shite, shigoto o shite, <u>hoka no hito ni tetsudatte</u>, ii koto o shite, sonna koto wa hontō ni taisetsu da to omoimasu.

'to help other person'

(22) そうなれば、悩みがあるとき、<u>他の人が手伝えられます</u>。(SLO08)

Sō nareba, nayami ga aru toki, <u>hoka no hito ga tetsudaeraremasu</u>.

'other person/people can help'

The need to express the relationship between one person and another is perhaps most visible in the following example, where we see that the word 人 *hito* is used to indicate both sides, but it is still emphasized by the adverb お互いに *otagaini*:

(23) <u>人がお互いに手伝うと</u>生活が簡単になります。(SLO01)

<u>Hito ga otagai ni tetsudau to</u> seikatsu ga kantan ni narimasu.

'If people help each other …'

Without emphasizing the existence of two sides, the idea of helping others is expressed in a slightly different way in the compositions of Japanese people:

(24) しかし、もっと広く言えば、<u>困っている人に手を差し伸べる国</u>はすなわち暮らしやすい国となる。(JAP01)

Shikashi, motto hiroku ieba, <u>komatte iru hito ni te o sashinoberu</u> kuni wa sunawachi sumiyasui kuni to naru.

'to offer a helping hand to someone in need'

(25) その中でも他者を尊重し、共に共生することや、<u>困っている人を助けること</u>が実践できる人々が多い国では不快な経験も少なくすむと考える。(JAP07)

Sono naka demo tasha o sonchō shi, tomo ni kyōsei suru koto ya, <u>komatte iru hito o tasukeru</u> koto ga jissen dekiru hitobito ga ōi kuni de wa fukai na keiken mo sukunaku sumu to kangaeru.

'to help a man in trouble'

In the above examples, we can see that under 困っている人 *komatteiru hito*, both the speaker and everyone around them can be designated. The term 困っている人 *komatteiru hito* can be interpreted as a general designation for a group of human beings and thus can be understood as both singular and plural (a person in trouble/people in trouble/anyone who is in trouble), or as a specified collective (sub)category. These examples reflect the tendency to separate individuals, which is possible in the students' native languages. This is in contrast with the nature of Japanese, which does not place an emphasis on 'us' vs. 'others' but on 'a person/humankind', 'anyone' belonging to the group 'in trouble'.

Similarly, the designation of species, which in languages with both singular and plural noun forms can be expressed through the use of the non-referential singular and the plural form alike, can also be found in the following examples produced by both analyzed groups. See examples (26)-(34):

(26) <u>人が生きていく上で常に必要となる</u>食料や水が手に入りやすいということは、<u>人が社会において生活していくための</u>最低限の需要が満たされているこ とであるといえる。(JAP05)

<u>Hito ga ikite iku ue de tsuneni hitsuyō to naru</u> shokuryō ya mizu ga te ni hairi yasui to iu koto wa, <u>hito ga shakai ni oite seikatsu shite iku tame</u> no saiteigen no jūyō ga mitasarete iru koto de aru to ieru.

'A person/people to live always need(s) ~';
'for a person/people to live in a society'

(27) そのため、人の移動をスムーズかつ安全に行えるよう、交通インフラが整っ
ている必要があると思う。(JAP18)

Sono tame, hito no idō o sumūzu katsu anzen ni okonaeru yō, kōtsū infura
ga totonotte iru hitsuyō ga aru to omou.

'for transport of a person/people to take place smoothly and safely'

(28) 雪が降らない国に生まれた人は、日本の冬に初めは大興奮するかもしれない
(JAP17)

Yuki ga furanai kuni ni umareta hito wa, Nihon no fuyu ni hajime wa
daikōfun suru kamoshirenai.

'A person/people born in a country where it doesn't snow'

(29) そして、となりの人に手伝ってくださいと聞くことができます。(GER09)

Soshite, tonari no hito ni tetsudatte kudasai to kiku koto ga dekimasu.

'one can ask for help from the person/people next to you'

(30) 権力がある人は法律を乱用すれば意味がありません。(SER23)

Kenryoku ga aru hito wa hōritsu o ran'yō sureba imi ga arimasen.

'a person/people with authority'

(31) 住みやすいの国では人が家屋を購入の可能性がある。(CRO33)

Sumiyasui no kuni de wa hito ga kaoku o kōnyū no kanōsei ga aru.

'a person/people can buy a house'

(32) しかし、何でも買うことができるだけで人は自己実現はできません。
(GER65)

Shikashi, nan demo kau koto ga dekiru dake de hito wa jiko jitsugen wa
dekimasen.

'a person/people not to be able to achieve self-actualization'

(33) 保険証を持っていない人は医者で高い代金をしなければなりません。
(GER56)

Hokenshō o motte inai hito wa isha de takai daikin o shinakereba
narimasen.

'a person/people who do(es) not have health insurance'

(34) たくさんの利点があるけど、<u>金がある人にとってどんな国も住みやすい国だ</u>と思う。また、<u>金がない人にとってどんな国も住みにくい国だ</u>と思う。(CRO06)

Takusan no riten ga aru kedo, <u>kane ga aru hito ni totte</u> donna kuni mo sumiyasui kuni da to omou. Mata, <u>kane ga nai hito ni totte</u> donna kuni mo suminikui kuni da to omou.

'for a person/people with/without money'

A larger number of the aforementioned and other examples with this meaning, according to the sample test, could be replaced with the word 人々 *hitobito* (but not with the word 人達 *hitotachi*), thus demonstrating the possibility of a plural interpretation of the originally used word 人 *hito*, as shown in (35)-(38).

(35) つまり、住むとは<u>人／人達／人々が一つの場所を決めて</u>、そこに留まり、日々を過ごすことなのだ。(JAP06)

Tsumari, sumu to wa <u>hito / ~~hitotachi~~ / hitobito ga hitotsu no basho o kimete</u>, soko ni todomari, hibi o sugosu koto na no da.

'a person/people decides/decide on one place'

(36) <u>人／人達／人々が移住し、旅行し、留学します。</u>(SLO03)

<u>Hito / ~~hitotachi~~ / hitobito ga ijū shi</u>, ryokō shi, ryūgaku shimasu.

'a person/people migrate(s)'

(37) 公園や湖などで<u>人／人達／人々は休むことができますから。</u>(GER09)

Kōen ya mizuumi nado de <u>hito / ~~hitotachi~~ / hitobito wa yasumu</u> koto ga dekimasu kara.

'a person/people can rest'

(38) 私の意見では、<u>人／人達／人々がいい生活できるための</u>国に必要なことが三つあります。(SER11)

Watashi no iken de wa, <u>hito / ~~hitotachi~~ / hitobito ga ii seikatsu dekiru tame</u> no kuni ni hitsuyō na koto ga mittsu arimasu.

'for a person/people to have a good life'

Although we noticed that the students' usage demonstrates the same conceptualization of the word 人 *hito* when it refers to the human species without numerical specification, there are also examples like this one, which we would initially interpret in the same way, as a numerically indefinite

expression of the species. However, this is incorrect usage and 人々 *hitobito* would be more appropriate.

(39) その結果、住みやすい国は政府が~~人~~／~~人達~~／人々の世話をする国だと思います。(CRO14)

Sono kekka, sumiyasui kuni wa seifu ga ~~hito~~ / ~~hitotachi~~ / hitobito no sewa o suru kuni da to omoimasu.

'the government takes care of a person/people'

This kind of example suggests that the word 人 *hito* cannot independently carry an explicit meaning of plurality, as would be required here.[14]

In the majority of the analyzed examples, where 人 *hito* referred to multiple people, thus, implying a plural meaning that cannot be interpreted as singular, this meaning was signaled either logically or syntactically. Logical clarity that it refers to a plurality was related, for example, to words like 日本人 *nihonjin* 'Japanese (person)' or 現地の人 *genchino hito* 'local person', which, unless referring to a specific individual, always imply a group of people defined by some common characteristic, such as living or originating from the same geographical area (Japanese people, locals, etc.). Syntactic indicators included phrases such as 大勢 *ōzei* 'many people; a great number of people', or adjectives like 多い *ōi* 'many; a lot(s) of', 少ない *sukunai* 'few; little', and so on; and instances where the word 人 *hito* is adnominally modified to designate a group. See examples (40)-(45):

(40) 二つ目に、アジア人を見慣れていて、外国人に対して広い心を持って接してくれる人が多いことだ。(JAP07)

Futatsume ni, Ajiajin o minarete ite, gaikokujin ni taishite hiroi kokoro o motte sesshite kureru hito ga ōi koto da.

'there are many people'

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[14] On the other hand, if 人々 *hitobito* is used here because understanding of plurality is necessitated, we wonder if there is a specific number beyond which this becomes obligatory, such as two or more in English, or over four in Serbian. However, we did not find studies on which we could rely for interpreting the necessity of this particular plurality specification.

(41) 万国共通語で英語はもちろん、中国語やマレー語が行き交う国では、公共交通機関でも複数の言語アナウンスが流れ、<u>現地の人のみならず</u>、観光客にとっても<u>わかりやすい</u>環境が整っている。(JAP11)

Bankoku kyōtsūgo de Eigo wa mochiron, Chūgokugo ya Marēgo ga ikikau kuni de wa, kōkyō kōtsū kikan demo fukusū no gengo anaunsu ga nagare, <u>genchi no hito nominarazu</u>, kankōkyaku ni totte mo <u>wakariyasui</u> kankyō ga totonotte iru.

'easy to understand not only for local people'

(42) このように、徹底してルールを決めて、国民を従わせる力がある国は住みやすい国として<u>海外の人にも認知される</u>のではないかと考える。(JAP11)

Kono yō ni, tettei shite rūru o kimete, kokumin o shitagawaseru chikara ga aru kuni wa sumiyasui kuni toshite <u>kaigai no hito ni mo ninchi sareru</u> no dewa nai ka to kangaeru.

'recognized even by people from overseas'

(43) また、日本から新しい国で生活する際、新しい国の国民、居住者、<u>近隣住民がどのような人か</u>は、重要である。(JAP12)

Mata, Nihon kara atarashii kuni de seikatsu suru sai, atarashii kuni no kokumin, kyojūsha, <u>kinrin jūmin ga dono yōna hito ka</u> wa, jūyō de aru.

'what kind of people the neighbors are'

(44) ３つ目だが、私は<u>家以外に人が属するコミュニティ</u>がなければならないと考える。(JAP18)

Mittsume da ga, watashi wa <u>ie igai ni hito ga zokusuru komyuniti</u> ga nakereba naranai to kangaeru.

'communities other than home where people belong'

(45) 二つ目は、<u>その国の人との関係</u>が良好であればあるほど住みやすいと感じると思います。(JAP03)

Futatsume wa, <u>sono kuni no hito to no kankei</u> ga ryōkō de areba aru hodo sumiyasui to kanjiru to omoimasu.

'the relationship with the people of that country'

In all the above examples, there is little ambiguity regarding whether the sentence refers to one person or multiple people, but the plurality of individuals is collectively determined, based on the associated group indicated and which can be numerically specified. Among foreign students,

we observe the usage with the same intended meaning of the word 人 *hito*. See examples (46)-(51):

(46) 若い人はそのチャンスを受けられるのもいけない。(SER27)

Wakai hito wa sono chansu o ukerareru no mo ikenai.

'young people'

(47) 給料が高い人も給料が低い人もご飯を多少に与えることができるように。(SER28)

Kyūryō ga takai hito mo kyūryō ga hikui hito mo gohan o tashō ni ataeru koto ga dekiru yō ni.

'people with high income and people with low income alike'

(48) そして、大学の後で、おぜいの人は仕事がありません。(SER32)

Soshite, daigaku no ato de, ozei no hito wa shigoto ga arimasen.

'a lot of people'

(49) 多くの人なら、たくさんお金を稼ぐことは命の目的ですが、生活に成功するために、お金は必要じゃないと思いますから、スペインへ行ったほうがいいです。(CRO07)

Ōku no hito nara, takusan okane o kasegu koto wa inochi no mokuteki desu ga, seikatsu ni seikō suru tame ni, okane wa hitsuyō janai to omoimasu kara, Supein e itta hō ga ii desu.

'many people'

(50) さまざまな研究によると、福祉の良い国に住んでいる人は、幸福感を感じることが非常に多いそうだ。(CRO03)

Samazama na kenkyū ni yoru to, fukushi no yoi kuni ni sunde iru hito wa, kōfukukan o kanjiru koto ga hijō ni ōi sō da.

'people living in ~ country feel a sense of well-being very often'

(51) 住みやすい国の中はいい人が多いです。(SLO09)

Sumiyasui kuni no naka wa ii hito ga ōi desu.

'many good people'

A considerable number of examples from this group of meaning with the originally used word 人 *hito* are indeed interchangeable with 人達 *hitotachi* or 人々 *hitobito*, as shown in (52)-(55):

(52) <u>良い国は良い人!／人達／人々!があると思います。</u>(CRO34)

<u>Yoi kuni wa yoi hito! / hitotachi / hitobito! ga aru</u> to omoimasu.

'a good country has good people'

(53) <u>国の人!／人達／人々!と話せなかったら</u>、その国に住んでいることは無理だと思います。(GER16)

<u>Kuni no hito! / hitotachi / hitobito! to hanasenakattara</u>, sono kuni ni sunde iru koto wa muri da to omoimasu.

'if you can't talk to people of a country'

(54) <u>教育を受けた人!／人達／人々が少ない国</u>は発展できません。(BOS05)

<u>Kyōiku o uketa hito! / hitotachi / hitobito ga sukunai kuni</u> wa hatten dekimasen.

'a country with a few uneducated people'

(55) <u>貧しい人!／人達／人々!もいないし、病気の人!／人達／人々!もいない国</u>は理想的な国に違いありませんが、それはありえないことです。(SER11)

<u>Mazushii hito! / hitotachi / hitobito! mo inai shi, byōki no hito / hitotachi / hitobito mo inai kuni</u> wa risōteki na kuni ni chigai arimasen ga, sore wa arienai koto desu.

'country without poor people and sick people'

Based on the above, we conclude that in our analyzed corpus, both Japanese and foreign students use the term 人 *hito* as a generic term, which can be understood as both singular and plural. Foreign students intend to specify the singular or mutual relationship between two individuals. Furthermore, the term appears solely in its plural sense when, with the help of modification or some specification, it signals that it refers to a particular group of people with same characteristics (for example, living in the same place). In other words, it suggests that there are multiple individuals who meet the same conditions, suggesting the possibility of numerical segmentation. In these cases, it appears that the words 人 *hito*, 人々 *hitobito*, and 人達 *hitotachi* are often interchangeable though it is not clear whether this interchangeability is conditioned by any factor, such as a specific number of people, for example. How familiar foreign students are with this interchangeability we will attempt to elucidate in the following section.

4.3 The noun 人々 *hitobito*

The noun 人々 *hitobito* is formed by duplicating the same root word, 人 *hito*. Words created in this manner are called 畳語 *jōgo* in Japanese, and this morphological process is unproductive (Sudo, 2017, p. 27), meaning there are few similarly formed words.[15] "These nouns are plural and incompatible with singular reference" (Sudo, 2017, p. 27), and they differ from 達 *tachi* in that they cannot have an associative meaning (Nakanishi & Tomioka, 2004), "and can only refer to homogeneous groups, each member of which is described by the noun" (Sudo, 2017, p. 27). The literature further highlights that they are not used simultaneously with a numerical classifier or plural suffix (Yasutake, 1989, p. 17). It is also stated that, even though they can originate from different parts of speech, once formed, they tend to refer to *statefulness* (jap. 状態性 *jōtaisei*) and to behave as adverbs (Matsumura, 1971, p. 325).

In the case of 人々 *hitobito*, there are a total of 69 instances of its usage in compositions by Japanese learners, and 17 instances in those by native speakers. At first glance, it is noticeable that some Japanese language learners use only 人 *hito*, others use primarily or exclusively 人々 *hitobito*, while the third group employs both forms in their compositions.[16] Specifically, in 12 compositions, there is either exclusive or predominant use of the noun 人々 *hitobito*, and generally an overuse of words with plural or even collective meaning.[17]

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[15] To list just a few others: 山々 *yamayama* 'mountains', but also 'very much'; 'have a great desire (to do)' etc.; 国々 *kuniguni* 'nations'; 'every nation [country]'; 日々 *hibi* 'every day'; 'daily'; 'from day to day', etc. (KKSD).

[16] Among Japanese compositions, there are only four compositions where only 人 *hito* appears, and three where 人々 *hitobito* is predominantly used, with only one out of 20 compositions using the word 人達 *hitotachi*.

[17] In one composition, the word 人口 *jinkō* 'population' is used six times, seemingly to emphasize the collective aspect of the people within the context discussed. Example:

さらに国の住んでいる人口は親切で面白くなければなりません. 天気は良うなると、人口が満足しているでしょう? 例えばミュンヘンはとても大きな町です。人口がぜんぜん時間がありませんから町の気は忙しです。 *Sarani kuni no sundeiru jinkō wa shinsetsu de omoshiroku nakereba narimasen. Tenki wa you nara to, jinkō ga manzoku shiteiru deshō? Tatoeba Myunhen wa totemo ookina machi desu. Jinkō ga zenzen jikan ga arimasen kara machi no ki ha isogashi desu.* (GER62 'the population living in the country'...'the population will be satisfied'...'the population has no time at all'.)

Regarding the dichotomy of "it doesn't matter how many there are (species meaning)" versus "it does matter how many there are (singular or plural)," for the word 人々 *hitobito* in the compositions of both analyzed groups, we observed a gradation of meanings from (1) an indefinite multitude in the sense of species meaning to (2) the meaning of a specific group of people as a potentially countable set, with the possibility of the existence of multiple identical or different groups. There are also transitional cases, so the boundaries among these meanings are not strict.[18]

Here are translations and interpretations of the examples provided, showing instances of the use of 人々 *hitobito* in the meaning of an indefinite multitude of people as a kind (species meaning), as in (56)-(59):

(56) 人々は、生活のためにお金が必要であるので、労働を欲します。(JAP10)

Hitobito wa, seikatsu no tame ni okane ga hitsuyō de aru node, rōdō o hoshimasu.

'people need money to live'

(57) 人々は生活のために十分な給料が要ります。(SER08)

Hitobito wa seikatsu no tame ni jūbun na kyūryō ga irimasu.

'people need a sufficient salary for living.'

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[18] The division of nouns into countable and mass nouns, which include collective nouns, in the Serbian language, for example, involves a third form for some countable nouns. This third form denotes an indefinite, uncountable multitude. According to the criterion of animacy, these nouns are divided into collective nouns—representing multiple beings as one group (such as *deca* 'children', *braća* 'brothers', *gospoda* 'gentlemen')—and aggregate nouns, which represent 'multiple non-living concepts as a collection of an indefinite number' (like *cveće* 'flowers', *lišće* 'leaves' (Mrazović, 2009, p. 229)). These exist alongside plural forms that are countable. Thus, there are *cvet* (singular) 'a flower', *cvetovi* (countable plural) 'flowers', and *cveće* (uncountable plural) 'flowers'; or *list* (singular) 'a leaf', *listovi* (countable plural) 'leaves', and *lišće* (uncountable plural) 'leaves'; and *stanovnik* (singular) 'a citizen', *stanovnici* (countable plural) 'citizens', *stanovništvo* (uncountable plural) 'citizens', etc. Similar divisions are also present in other South Slavic languages (including Slovenian, Croatian, and Bosnian). These languages are the mother tongues of two-thirds of the authors of the compositions from the analyzed corpus. Therefore, it is not surprising that the concept of the same form for both countable and uncountable plurality was familiar to the students as they display it in the sentences with 人 *hito* and 人々 *hitobito*.

(58) いい経済状態があるので、人々の状態もだんだん良くなります。(GER15)

Ii keizai jōtai ga aru node, <u>hitobito no jōtai mo dandan yoku narimasu</u>.

'the condition of the people gradually gets better.'

(59) たくさんビーチがあって、いつも天気が良くて、人々も気安いですね。 (CRO07)

Takusan bīchi ga atte, itsumo tenki ga yokute, <u>hitobito mo kiyasui desu</u> ne.

'the people are friendly.'

These examples demonstrate how 人々 *hitobito* is used to refer to people in a general, broad sense, highlighting the collective or uncountable multitude aspect, as previously discussed.

Following are the examples showing instances of 人々 *hitobito* referring to specific groups of people, which highlights the plural sense in terms of a set or a group:

(60) 周りと違う見た目の人が自分だけでない。そして母国の文化を共有していたり、理解してくれたり興味持ってくれたりする人がいる。<u>そのような人々との出会いで</u>驚くほど暮らしやすくなるものだ。(JAP01)

Mawari to chigau mitame no hito ga jibun dake de nai. Soshite bokoku no bunka o kyōyū shite itari, rikai shite kuretari kyōmi motte kuretari suru hito ga iru. <u>Sonoyōna hitobito to no deai de</u> odoroku hodo kurashiyasuku naru mono da.

'meeting such people'

(61) シンガポールは<u>中国の華僑やマレーシアの人々が多く移り住んで</u>成り立つ異民国である。 (JAP11)

Shingapōru wa <u>Chūgoku no kakyō ya Marēshia no hitobito ga ōku utsuri sunde</u> naritatsu iminkoku de aru.

'many Chinese expatriates and Malaysian people moved and live'

(62) <u>人々が一緒に食べ物を作って</u>、飲み物を飲んで、気を楽にして、休暇を過ごしている。(CRO10)

<u>Hitobito ga issho ni tabemono o tsukutte</u>, nomimono o nonde, ki o raku ni shite, kyūka o sugoshite iru.

'people are making food together'

(63) より<u>教育を受けた有能な人々とともに</u>、国は繁栄し、生活水準は向上するでしょう。(SER20)

Yori <u>kyōiku o uketa yūnō na hitobito to tomo ni</u>, kuni wa han'ei shi, seikatsu suijun wa kōjō suru deshō.

'with educated and competent people'

(64) 特に<u>都市の人々</u>が外国人に声をかけるに早いし、友達をできます。(SLO14)

Tokuni <u>toshi no hitobito</u> ga gaikokujin ni koe o kakeru ni hayai shi, tomodachi o dekimasu.

'people from the city'

(65) 住みやすい国は<u>あらゆる種類の人々がうけ入れるべき</u>です。(BOS08)

<u>Sumiyasui kuni wa arayuru shurui no hitobito ga ukeireru beki</u> desu.

'~ should welcome all kinds of people.'

These examples show that 人々 *hitobito* was used to refer to groups defined by shared characteristics, nationality, or other specific traits, emphasizing the set-based meaning of plurality.

It is notable that among the examples with 人々 *hitobito*, unlike the use of 人達 *hitotachi*, a higher number of errors is not observed in student compositions. However, the meanings associated with 人々 *hitobito* are also seen with the word 人 *hito*. In the substitution test, 人々 *hitobito* is more frequently replaceable with 人 *hito* than with 人達 *hitotachi*. Out of 23 sentences originally using the word 人々 *hitobito* in the test, over 15 times it was possible or even preferable to replace it with 人 *hito*. Examples thereof include (66)-(69):

(66) それらが手に入りやすいほど、<u>人／人達／人々は容易に社会生活を送ることが出来る</u>。(JAP05)

Sorera ga te ni hairiyasui hodo, <u>hito / ~~hitotachi~~ / hitobito wa yōi ni shakai seikatsu o okuru koto ga dekiru</u>.

'people can lead a social life more easily.'

(67) また、田舎の人!／人達／人々は外国人に自分の文化、習慣などを紹介する
のが嬉しくて、地元の料理をおごるも多いです。(SLO14)

Mata, <u>inaka no hito! / hitotachi / hitobito</u> wa gaikokujin ni jibun no bunka, shūkan nado o shōkai suru no ga ureshikute, jimoto no ryōri o ogoru mo ōi desu.

'countryside people'

(68) 人!／~~人達~~／人々は家族や自分自身のために仕事をする必要があります。人!
／~~人達~~／人々は幸せになるために健康である必要があります。(SER15)

<u>hito! / ~~hitotachi~~ / hitobito wa</u> kazoku ya jibun jishin no tame ni shigoto o suru hitsuyō ga arimasu. <u>hito! / ~~hitotachi~~ / hitobito wa shiawase ni naru tame ni</u> kenkō de aru hitsuyō ga arimasu.

'people need to work ... for people to be happy'

(69) 逆に、差別が強い国や社会で、差別された人!／人達／人々は一生懸命頑張
っても、承認されていない場合もあると思いますので、そういう国は全然住
みやすくないと思います。(CRO14)

Gyaku ni, sabetsu ga tsuyoi kuni ya shakai de, <u>sabetsu sareta hito! / hitotachi / hitobito</u> wa isshōkenmei ganbatte mo, shōnin sarete inai baai mo aru to omoimasu node, sō iu kuni wa zenzen sumiyasukunai to omoimasu.

'discriminated people'

These examples illustrate the flexible use of 人 *hito*, 人々 *hitobito*, and 人達 *hitotachi*, highlighting that while 人々 *hitobito* often conveys a more defined set or group, it is often replaced by the more general 人 *hito* without loss of meaning.

On the other hand, although 人達 *hitotachi* is a noun that, like 人々 *hitobito*, is intended to denote plurality, it could not replace 人々 *hitobito* in 16 to 19 cases (out of 23 in the test sample). This is a very suggestive result that warrants further exploration. See examples (70)-(73) below:

(70) これらは言うまでもなく、生きることに直接関わる必要不可欠なものであり、これらが人／人達／人々にとって高価すぎたり人口に対して量が少なすぎたりすると、その社会に住みづらくなる原因となってしまう。(JAP05)

Korera wa iu made mo naku, ikiru koto ni chokusetsu kakawaru hitsuyō fukaketsu na mono deari, <u>korera ga hito / ~~hitotachi~~ / hitobito ni totte kōka sugitari</u> jinkō ni taishite ryō ga sukunasugitari suru to, sono shakai ni sumizuraku naru gen'in to natte shimau.

'they become too expensive for people'

(71) もちろん、大事なことは人／人達／人々だと思います。(SER30)

Mochiron, <u>daiji na koto wa hito / ~~hitotachi~~ / hitobito da</u> to omoimasu.

'what is important is people'

(72) まず、人／人達／人々は親切だと思うので、いいポイントです。(SLO01)

Mazu, <u>hito / ~~hitotachi~~ / hitobito wa shinsetsu da</u> to omou node, ii pointo desu.

'people are kind'

(73) 住みやすい状況は人!／人達／人々にとってそれぞれ違うと思いますが大切な点は安全性だと思います。(GER68)

<u>Sumiyasui jōkyō wa hito! / ~~hitotachi~~ / hitobito ni totte sorezore chigau</u> to omoimasu ga, taisetsu na ten wa anzensei da to omoimasu.

'the conditions for livability differ for each person/people'

The above examples highlight that 人々 *hitobito* is favored over 人達 *hitotachi* because it more clearly signifies a general group in the context of our examined sentences. It is also noteworthy that 人々 *hitobito* may not necessarily require adnominal modification, as demonstrated in examples (70)-(73). However, the distinction in usage between 人々 *hitobito* and 人達 *hitotachi* underscores the subtle differences in how these plural meaning words engage with the concept of collectivity in Japanese.

4.4 The noun 人達 *hitotachi*

The semantic representation of human collectivity has found lexical expression in the Japanese language, giving rise to terms such as 人達 *hitotachi* with a plural suffix, and 人々 *hitobito*, resulting from noun reduplication, which was discussed in the previous chapter. Literature suggests that the plural suffix does not merely denote plurality but imparts

a collective meaning to the head noun,[19] which must represent a living entity and be appropriately socially stratified. For instance, 先生達 *sensei-tachi* does not always equate to 'teachers' as it may include individuals who are not teachers but are associated with a school environment (Yasutake, 1989, pp. 24-25). In other words, plural suffixes can have both additive (same set members) and associative (a group represented by the noun) meanings (Tatsumi, 2017, p. 233; Nakanishi & Tomioka, 2004).

In corpus compositions, 人達 *hitotachi* is much less frequently used (eight instances among foreign students and one among Japanese). Student essays typically use it only with an additive meaning, thereby conveying a sense of plurality; it is characteristic that some students feel the need to emphasize the plural sense, hence repeating it multiple times in a composition. Moreover, a number of participants exclusively use words with plural meaning, with a preference for 人々 *hitobito* over 人達 *hitotachi*. Although this analysis will not delve deeper into error analysis, it is evident that there is often either incorrect (over)usage of 人達 *hitotachi* or usage that would be identical to that of 人 *hito* or 人々 *hitobito*. The following two examples include the original use of the word 人達 *hitotachi* in student compositions.

(74) 選挙があると自分の意見で政治に影響をできて、政治家に人／人達／人々は大事だと思うことが表れる可能性があります。それで、選挙された議会はかんりょうしゅぎのことを確立して、人／人達／人々は毎日の予定を立てることができます。(GER65)

Senkyo ga aru to jibun no iken de seiji ni eikyō o dekite, seijika ni ~~hito~~ / ~~hitotachi~~ / hitobito wa daiji da to omou koto ga arawareru kanōsei ga arimasu. Sore de, senkyo sareta gikai wa kanryōshugi no koto o kakuritsu shite, ~~hito~~ / ~~hitotachi~~ / hitobito wa mainichi no yotei o tateru koto ga dekimasu.

'people are important for politicians' ... 'people can plan their daily schedules'

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[19] "Plurality suffixes in Japanese do not mark simple plurality in the sense of two or more single entities, but rather they function semantically as a collective noun formative" (Yasutake, 1989, p. 24).

(75) まず最初に、<u>人／</u><s>人達</s><u>／人々はみんなそれぞれ違う</u>ので、誰もが自分にとって住みやすいと思うような完璧な国はない。…一方で、<u>忙しい都市を好む人</u><u>／</u><s>人達</s><u>／人々もいる</u>ので、先進国の方が住みやすい。…そうすれば、自分の境遇に<u>不満を持つ人／</u><s>人達</s><u>／人々が少なくなり</u>、犯罪を犯す必要性も少なくなるだろう。(CRO11)

Mazu saisho ni, <u>hito /</u> <s>hitotachi</s> <u>/ hitobito wa minna sorezore chigau</u> node, daremo ga jibun ni totte sumiyasui to omouyō na kanpeki na kuni wa nai. ... Ippō de, <u>isogashii toshi o konomu hito /</u> <s>hitotachi</s> <u>/ hitobito mo iru</u> node, senshinkoku no hō ga sumiyasui. ... Sō sureba, jibun no kyōgū ni <u>fuman o motsu hito /</u> <s>hitotachi</s> <u>/ hitobito ga sukunaku nari,</u> hanzai o okasu hitsuyōsei mo sukunaku naru darō.

'since everyone is different' ... 'people who prefer bustling cities' ... 'fewer people being dissatisfied'

The use of these suffixes is limited[20] and marked[21], as can be observed from the fact that in a test sample of 78 utterances, 人達 *hitotachi* was rejected or questioned as a possible replacement in 45 cases by one tester and 54 by another. In all instances where 人達 *hitotachi* was deemed acceptable, the use of both 人 *hito* and 人々 *hitobito*, or just one of these, was also acceptable. In no examples was 人達 *hitotachi* prescribed but, rather, only offered as acceptable. Additionally, as observed in examples (52), (53), (54), (55), (67), and (69), and in contrast with examples (66), (68), (70), (71), (72), and (73), it appears that 人達 *hitotachi* is more commonly associated with a known, specific group of people, i.e., it is more referential. This is syntactically indicated by a preceding modifying phrase. These observations underscore the need for further examination of the nuanced differences in the plural meanings and syntactic behavior of these terms.

5   Conclusion and final remarks

While seemingly sharing common characteristics, it is evident that the noun 人 *hito* 'a person/people' differs significantly from 林檎 *ringo* 'an apple/apples'

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[20] "[…] four basic conditions on their usage, i.e. the animacy constraint, the applicability to proper names, the politeness scale and the overall infrequency" (Yasutake, 1989, p. 17).

[21] "Plurality suffixes are used in Japanese only when the speaker/writer is particularly conscious of the plurality of the referent or there is a contextual need" (Yasutake, 1989, p. 20).

in its importance to speakers, as reflected by its status as a hypernym for a number of words, some of which relate to community forms. Some of these community-relevant words denote countable groups (such as 家族 *kazoku* 'family,' 両親 *ryōshin* 'parents,' 兄弟 *kyōdai* 'siblings,' but also 外国人 *gaikokujin* 'foreigners,' 人口 *jinkō* 'population'), while others are perceived more like mass nouns (such as 人間 *ningen* 'humanity,' 人類 *jinrui* 'mankind'). Given the importance of the individual-society relationship, it is unsurprising that the language has so many words defining this relationship. This relationship with other words distinguishes 人 *hito* from most other Japanese nouns.

The significance of 人 *hito* is also highlighted by the extensive derivational network formed around it, which includes the two plural-signifying words analyzed here, 人達 *hitotachi* and 人々 *hitobito*, as well as the word 個人 *kojin* 'individual', which conveys a singular meaning. The analysis of lexical meanings is often featured in cognitive studies, which have also served as a model here.

While other nouns may not be able to express plural meaning without the aid of numbers or adverbs, the word for person has two, but this fact has not received much attention in textbooks or linguistic studies. Moreover, as we have seen, plurality in Japanese is not a focal point in teaching Japanese as a foreign language, except at the lexical level. Discussions about the number category in Japanese typically occur in the field of general linguistics and semantics, primarily in comparison with English. These studies have shown that the dichotomy singular vs. plural present in European languages shifts in Japanese to number irrelevant (stating kind) vs. number relevant, where the latter category is marked and includes both singular and plural.

This study analyzed a SUMIYASUIKUNI-corpus of compositions by Japanese language students, alongside compositions by Japanese students on the topic of "A Country That Is Easy to Live in" to see whether the concepts and meanings associated with 人 *hito*, 人々 *hitobito*, and 人達 *hitotachi* align among students of Japanese, even though they are usually not specifically told about them in the educational process. We hoped this comparison would highlight some aspects of the Japanese language that remain unnoticed if viewed in isolation.

The corpus analysis showed that 人 *hito* is used among both Japanese and Japanese language students with the following meanings: non-referential singular (species), countable plural (referring to a specified

group), and uncountable plural (referring to a species). It can be assumed that this alignment results from similar capabilities of common nouns in the native languages of the students. However, it is evident that there are uncertainties in using terms that would signal singular or plural, which was expected since, as we have demonstrated, its usage is marked in Japanese. In particular, the singular in the sense of an individual separated from society or set against it, as well as the relationship implying two parties, two persons (e.g., someone helping someone), proved challenging for the students. Additionally, the plural meaning of the word 人 *hito* has proven to be limited to cases where it takes on a collective meaning, whether it is in non-referential use generally referring to a species, in syntactic or adnominal modification (for example, with 多い *ōi* 'many'), or in a lexical manner (alongside names of countries, locations, etc.).

The corpus analysis regarding the word 人々 *hitobito* revealed the expected meanings of plurality, ranging from the general meaning of a species to the meaning of a group with (countable) members of the same characteristics. In many cases, 人々 *hitobito* proved interchangeable with 人 *hito*, but not with 人達 *hitotachi*. On the other hand, there are examples where the only acceptable solution was 人々 *hitobito*, leaving it unclear whether the implied or assumed number of people is what influences the necessary choice of 人々 *hitobito* or if some other factor plays a role.

The results concerning the noun 人達 *hitotachi* are particularly intriguing. In the analyzed corpus, this noun was rarely a possible alternative to 人 *hito* and 人々 *hitobito*, and it was often the most incorrect choice among students. It was also evident from the substitution test that 人達 *hitotachi* and 人々 *hitobito* are much less interchangeable than 人々 *hitobito* and 人 *hito*, which was an unexpected result since both 人達 *hitotachi* and 人々 *hitobito* denote only a plurality of people. The nature of the difference in the plurality conveyed by these two nouns requires further examination.

It can generally be stated that all the meanings observed among native speakers were also present in the students' examples. However, although error analysis was not conducted, there was a noticeable overuse of words with plural meanings by some students. This overuse indicates that some students could not precisely express their intended ideas due to an insufficient understanding of the relationship between the individual and society in the language.

Furthermore, this study has opened new questions about the meaning of singular and plural in Japanese, particularly with nouns related to human beings. These questions warrant separate analysis from other instances of number distinction (e.g., different groups of words used to name human beings and their communities).

We also believe it is necessary to conduct further investigations of the interchangeability of the three words analyzed here, 人 *hito*, 人々 *hitobito*, and 人達 *hitotachi*, using a specially designed questionnaire that would reveal much more about the expressed meaning of plurality and the boundaries and overlaps of these words as synonyms. In particular, it is essential to explore further how the plural meaning words such as 人達 *hitotachi* and 人々 *hitobito* differ and what conditions necessitate the choice of 人々 *hitobito* (such that it cannot be replaced by 人 *hito*) and vice versa.

The question of the number category in the Japanese language might also be well examined in comparison with other systems, not just those manifested in the English language. Further research in this area could provide deeper insights into the cognitive and social aspects of language usage in different linguistic communities.

Acknowledgments

Abbreviations and references for textbooks and dictionaries

SHKNG   『初級日本語 [*Shokyū nihongo*]』東京外国語大学 Japanese Language Online Resource. (n.d.). Retrieved March 31, 2024, from https://jplang.tufs.ac.jp/

MNN   みんなの日本語 (初級 1 (2018),2 (2001) & 中級 1 (2015)－本冊＆翻訳・文法解説英語版)　スリーエーネットワーク Edited and written by Surīē nettowāku. *Minna no nihongo. shokyū I (2018), II (2001) & chūkyū 1 (2015)*. Tōkyō: Surīē Nettowāku

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