

# Forming a National Standard: Japanese Language Standardization and National Identity

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## Introduction

The diverse linguistic make up of Japan transformed drastically beginning in the Meiji Era (1868-1912) into an increasingly monolingual society. At the same time, the perception of Japanese national identity also codified into much fewer options. To a large extent, this was a plan contrived by the nation's leaders in order to create a modern, unified nation. Officials knowledgeable in linguistics used the standardization of the Japanese language (*hyôjungo*) as a tool to influence nation identity. This decision was the response of Japan's desire for a more influential position in the world and the structure changes within the country. These leaders attempted to make the language reflect the changes in society that they wanted to happen—whether they wanted to emphasize classical Japanese or embrace modernity. This process of language planning runs contrary to the natural evolution of languages and occurs over a much shorter span of time.

In the spring of 2011, I had the opportunity to study abroad in the Kansai area of Japan. Here, I was exposed to the dichotomy between the standard language and the local language. The Japanese locals that I met spoke differently from the language that I learned in the classrooms at the university I was attending. At home,

my host family often said *wakarahen*, meaning “I don’t know” or “I don’t understand.” At first, I did not understand what this meant, so I asked them about it; they explained that it meant the same thing as *wakaranai*, a form that I had learned before. Though the word was the same, my host family used a different word ending than what was widely accepted and, therefore, taught as the correct way to conjugate the verb.

While I was still in Japan, I needed to come up with a topic for my thesis. As I was searching through online journal databases for any ideas, I came across an article on Inoue Hisashi’s play *Kokugo Gannen* (Year One of Japanese National Language). This play highlights the rich diversity of dialect that could be seen in geographical and social differences and laments their passing.

Perhaps because I had seen some of the differences in the Kansai dialect from standard Japanese or because of my background of having previously taken a course on language and culture and having linguists in my family, I quickly became interested in this topic. Due to the lack of information in English on Inoue Hisashi’s play, however, I continued to search for other related information and found the whole process of language standardization in Japan very intriguing.

Looking at the reasons for the change, the methods used to change the language and their significance, and how the new standard language spread throughout Japan, I plan to use a sociolinguistic perspective. Therefore, I look at the language and people’s relationship to the language to see how things changed during this period. For example, what was the linguistic climate like prior to the

Meiji Era and what did the reformers feel they needed to change about it and why? What methods did they use to carry out the language standardization and why were they significant? And finally, how does the new standard language reflect the image that the leaders were trying to create and the actuality of how Japan perceives itself after the standardization?

The first chapter gives background on Japan's social and linguistic history leading up to the Meiji Era and the reasons for change. Japan was considerably more divided regionally, and therefore the linguistic differences were not a major concern even if they could be inconvenient. Centralization of power in Tokyo as a result of the restoration of the emperor, Western contact and influence, increased interaction within Japan, and the desire to create a powerful nation were the major factors that led to the mostly deliberate standardization of language.

The second chapter looks at the different groups formed to advocate diverse plans for the changes that should take place in the Japanese language. It then analyzes the relationship between methods of shaping and assimilating the standard language that these groups attempted and the resulting national identity. Surveys, one of these methods, were used to determine what sentence endings from the Tokyo dialect were most widely understood throughout the country.

The third chapter delves into the methods for the spread of the new standard language. Education was the most prominent method for spreading the standard language, but for those not in schools, other methods were used such as literary publications and stories in newspapers.



Much has been written on the topic of Japanese language and national identity since the year 2000. Earlier sources tend to focus on modernization as it relates to language standardization, while later writings investigate the standardization's relation to national identity. Exceptions include Carol Gluck's book *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period* (1985) in which she connects the change in ideology with language standardization. This subject is generally approached mainly through the fields of linguistics, history, fiction authors and literary criticism.

Contemporary scholars such as Carol Gluck, Patricia Wetzel, Nanette Twine, Hiraku Shimoda, Richard Torrence, and J.V. Neustupny support the conclusion of the deliberative nature of the standardization of Japanese for the purpose of uniting the country so that it could move forward as a modern nation. Each has a somewhat different approach to the subject, but they are crucial to my study. Others such as Mark Hudson, an archeological anthropologist, and Brian McVeigh, a social anthropologist, provide insight into the general perception of being Japanese and how it has been constructed over time. Both are important, especially because of the shortage of research I have found that deals with the effect of standardization on later ideas of Japanese national identity. Linguists Masayoshi Shibatani, Twine, Wetzel, and especially Yoichi Fujiwara are the most technical regarding the language itself.

Language planners used standardization to arbitrarily create unity where it did not exist before. This included the spread of social concepts and modern ideas expressed through the structure—such as honorifics and incorporation of common vernacular—and vocabulary—such as new concepts that required descriptive terms—of the standard language. Leaders were not united on how the language should be changed, and they formed separate groups to advocate their respective ideas for change, which they enacted through publishing writings, education, and forming councils.

## Reasons for Change

Beginning in the Meiji Era (1868-1912), Japan underwent a drastic change from being a country with many subgroups and corresponding dialects to a single united nation with one standard language. What were the causes for this transition? There were several reasons including the formation of a new centralized nation and the need to spread information throughout the country. I will explain how the state of the Japanese language was before 1868, why the nation's leaders felt that it was necessary to bring about change, and what they hoped to achieve by this change. Also, to what extent the language was intentionally created or developed on its own will also be discussed.

### **Japanese Language Before the Meiji Era**

Several authors extensively discuss the status of the linguistic climate in Japan prior to the Meiji Era. In his article "A Dialect-Geographical Study of the Japanese Dialects," linguist Yoichi Fujiwara gives a very technical analysis of the breakdown of the various dialects in Japan prior to their eradication. Fujiwara does not address the change in language that I will be focusing on, as he mostly identifies

the dialects and the differences between them. Richard Torrence's article "Literacy and Literature in Osaka, 1890-1940" is another source that focuses on a specific area, Osaka, and its response to the standardization of language and modernism.

Masayoshi Shibatani also looks at the dialects in *The Languages of Japan*, but this source discusses the history of the dialects and particularly how they changed during the Meiji Period. Changes in society at large are shown to be a major cause in the reason for a language revision in the least, especially relating the elaborate honorifics system's lack of practicality in a society where the hierarchy to go with the honorifics system was no longer in place. The different aspects such as location, history of the dialect, and level of formality within the dialect relate to how some dialects were favored more than others entering the Meiji Period.

Also from a historical perspective, Hiraku Shimoda writes about the modernization of language in "Tongues-Tied: The Making of a 'National Language' and the Discovery of Dialects in Meiji Japan." A summary of previous historical perspectives on the subject is given, where many of the historians' opinions have a negative impression on the standardization of language as it eradicated the local dialects. The article discusses how Japan went from praising its regional dialects (720) to fervently pursuing a single national language (734).

Looking at these perspectives, it is important to understand pre-Meiji Japan in order to see what the later changes brought about on the nation. Before the Meiji Era (1868-1912), Japan was characterized by a feudal system with elaborate

hierarchies demonstrated in language through the use of complex linguistic honorific systems and the distinction between the speech of different classes. Also during this time, people living in the southernmost large island, Kyushu, were not considered to be a part of the same people group as those living in the capital, Tokyo, and neither could easily understand each other's dialects (Shimoda 718; Shibatani 185). Furthermore, written language was closely connected with Chinese and only used by the upper class.

The social system before the Meiji Period was quite complex and rigid, and as language tends to reflect society at large, so was the linguistic system of honorifics (Shibatani 124). These systems were more elaborate than the *keigo* known today, especially since there were different rules depending on the region and not simply because more hierarchies existed that required distinguishing speech patterns.

A significant amount of variation occurred in the different dialects spread across Japan. Some were even drastically different, such as *ryûkyû-go*, the dialects of the Ryûkyû Islands and Okinawa. The addition of *go* (語) after *ryûkyû* indicates that it was thought of as an independent language, or perhaps a sister language, as *go* is a suffix for language (Shibatani 189). But most dialects at least exhibited connections with the other nearby Japanese dialects. Multiple variations of the same word are one manifestation of the distinctions between dialects. However, the most prominent differences were to be found in variety of sentence endings. These endings often relate back to various honorifics employed when speaking to people of specific classes. Dialects differed to such a degree that dialect dictionaries had to

accompany any form of literature that left the audience of its own dialect (Shimoda 718). Because many dialects were not well known outside of their respective region, this was a difficult task, and usually the equivalents were given in Kyoto speech or later Edo speech. Earlier in the Edo Period, the differences in local vernacular had little consequence on Japanese society as a whole because the different groups had little need to speak with the other linguistic groups, but leading up to the Meiji Era, as an increased level of interaction began to take place especially between Tokyo and people from other regions of Japan, problems with communication began to arise.

The acceptability of dialects was very different before the Meiji Era. In the years leading up to 1868, there was already a central pull towards accepting the Edo dialect. However, the reasons for this adjustment were primarily the result of trade convenience and fashionableness (Shimoda 720). On the other hand, speakers of a certain dialect often felt a sense of pride about their distinct dialects, especially when they felt that their dialect was closer to pure Japanese and not influenced over time by Chinese, as was the case in the larger cities (720).

Even early on in Japanese history there was, however, some sense of connectedness between the various peoples of Japan, though it was a loose concept and not well implemented. The word *shinkoku* (神国), meaning divine nation, was used considerably around the time of the Mongolian invasion during the late thirteenth century that caused a need for unification to some degree for their defense (Hudson 239). Despite this and the later concept and words of *kuni*

(国) and *nihon* (日本) (country/nation and Japan, respectively) existed since the late seventeenth century, it is unclear how widespread the concept was used (238). While each distinct region and social status differed in language, political structure, and culture, it is possible that the people of the main Japanese islands (with the exception of Hokkaido) still saw Japan as a small group of loosely aligned nations. The upper classes in Japan were probably the ones who were at least beginning to see Japan as one group of people (237). Those living in the country and not of the upper class placed more value on their respective dialects because they did not need to interact with people from other regions. Aristocrats were found trying to maintain their position in society. They needed to take part in the affairs of other groups of people, and therefore, also had to be able to converse with them. The speech style of the area that held the most power and prestige, mostly the Edo and Kyoto dialects,<sup>1</sup> became the most fashionable, with young women learning to speak them so that they would appear more sophisticated (Shimoda 720). Also, association with certain dialects was important for status because at this point in time, a writing system was not in place for the common vernacular (Twine 429). Despite the national education system, the lower class was only starting to become literate in the sense that they could only read and write the kana syllabaries previously developed for upper class women.

In reality, writing still closely resembled the Chinese system from which it was adopted. *Kanbun*, meaning “Chinese writing” and otherwise known as Sino-

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<sup>1</sup> These two dialects in particular were popular because Edo (present-day Tokyo) was becoming the new center and the capital of Kyoto represented the old, traditional center.

Japanese, was the most highly regarded writing form. This term included both forms that attempted to use Chinese word order and forms that used the characters but maintained Japanese word order with the help of katakana (Gottlieb 41). Because of the important position that China occupied in the world from Japan's point of view (prior to coming in greater contact with the West around the beginning of the Meiji Period), association with China implied elegance and sophistication (Habein 97). The formal tone of *kanbun* strengthened its position as a higher form of writing. Also, the ease with which Chinese people could understand *kanbun* and with which Japanese people who were familiar with *kanbun* could understand the Chinese language made it practical given that Japan removed itself from isolation (Habein 97). Other respected styles existed as well, including *wabun*, derived from the classical Japanese of the Heian Court. *Wabun* was praised for its graceful, poetic nature, and it contained more honorifics than *kanbun* (Gottlieb 41-2). The reliance on classical language writing systems made it difficult for common people to learn them.

### **Reasons for the Shift in Linguistics**

In *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period*, Carol Gluck focuses on how the ideological ideas of the time caused changes in the language. The new developments discussed here are mostly new vocabulary as opposed to grammar or sentence endings. Her ideas on how these words spread throughout Japan geographically and socioeconomically are more natural in process. As a result of the increasing interconnectedness of Japan in multiple ways, the shifts in language were



able to spread to many more people than the already common shifts and borrowing between neighboring dialects (249). This took place despite the fact that some of the new vocabulary was intended only for certain groups of people (247). Also, new concepts and technology emerged during the period of modernization that required new language to describe them (247, 254). These ideas may shed light on some of the more practical developments but does little to address the active role the nation's leaders took in changing the language that other authors such as Wetzel and Shimoda discuss in more detail. Gluck does not, however, completely ignore the role of the authorities in the language transition. Three levels of transmission of ideological language are presented—from language that is understood because people are explicitly told the meaning, to meanings that are understood on a deeper level because of social context. Of particular interest is Gluck's suggestion for the open reception of the Japanese towards the new language because of socially learned ideas (275). This theme is also addressed in Shimoda and Neustupny.

J. V. Neustupny claims that linguistic features are determined by social systems (34). Neustupny highlights how the modernization of Japanese began in the Meiji period, but also continued during the Taisho and Showa periods and even up until today (35), similar to what can also be found in Wetzel's book. Interestingly, while the majority of writings tend to look at the standardization as an unfortunate event to some degree, Neustupny seems very enthusiastic about its success.

Neustupny claims that it was a very successful process because the Japanese were

able to create a “homogenous” language and the standardization helped to soften social hierarchies as more people gained access to the language and literacy (36). While these claims might be true, comments are also made on the uniqueness and originality of Japanese (37) that are difficult to take seriously considering that the language significantly borrows from Chinese and because of research such as that done by Hudson.

Another perspective relating to change is found in “Standardizing Written Japanese: A Factor in Modernization” in which Nanette Gottlieb (nee Twine) discusses how the efforts to combine written and spoken Japanese were a major driving force in the standardization process. Here, both the practical and nationalistic reasons for the development that occurred during the Meiji period are discussed (429). This is another more limited angle (similar to Wetzel’s discussion on *keigo*) that is helpful for more specificity.

Similarly, in *The History of the Japanese Written Language*, Yaeko Sato Habein also focuses on the development of written Japanese—in this case from its origins. The source offers a perspective on how the shift of influence over the language from China to the West affected the changes made during the Meiji Period similarly to Gottlieb. Diversity in writing styles prior the Meiji Period are also discussed, providing a more detailed foundation to base the changes on.

Similar to Habein, the shift from being influenced by China to being influenced by the West plays an important role in this perspective in Nanette

Gottlieb's *Language and Society in Japan*. Gottlieb focuses mainly on more recent times, but there is still some valuable information relating to the Meiji Period. Discussions on policy, reforms, identity, and history of language reform are included.

Patricia Wetzel suggests that "ultimately language intervention is about ideology," and that language is "a time-honored field for contending arguments about the way the world ought or ought not to be" (43). Japan's position in the world was changing. With an increased amount of interaction with the West and a growing interest of dominance in its own realm, it was time for the Meiji government to change how its people felt about the nation and its motives so that the leaders of Japan would have the support they needed. Politically, this meant uniting all of Japan under the new emperor, but how could this be done when loyalties were focused primarily on local entities? Language became an important tool for carrying out this immense objective.

With the emphasis now on the West, the Japanese saw that Western countries' written language generally corresponded to the spoken language (Habein 97). Wanting to emulate the success they saw in the West, the Japanese began to examine the benefits. Japanese scholars wanted to be able to spread information in greater quantity and with more efficiency, much like what they observed taking shape in the West. For this purpose, they wanted a standard form of written Japanese to be recognized throughout Japan (Wetzel 45). Two problems remained in the way of accomplishing this. One was that the current writing system was used

mostly by the upper class. The second reason was that because the writing system was based on Chinese it varied drastically from vernacular language, especially the many different dialects around Japan (Twine 1988). In order to create a cohesive writing system, the language had to be made to conform to it and vice versa. The movement to combine the two became known as *genbun itchi*, meaning the “unification of written and spoken styles” (Wetzel 45). In addition, because China was losing its influence on Japan, it no longer was of importance that the language maintained its relationship with Chinese. With unification and the result of the Sino-Japanese War<sup>2</sup> came a new confidence in being “Japanese,” resulting in proponents of modernization to welcome the idea of basing the writing system on spoken Japanese (Gottlieb 57).

Furthermore, along with modernization came the upheaval of the old hierarchies that had caused both the restriction of writing and the elaborate honorific patterns. Many possible changes in language were brought into consideration because they were no longer relevant in the present society (Shibatani 124). Confusion over honorifics now that were previously matched up with specific speakers and audiences that no longer existed caused the honorifics to be simplified.

Aside from uniting and facilitating interaction between the Japanese, the need for education proved to be a driving force in the cause (and later spread) of a

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<sup>2</sup> The Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) was fought between Japan and China over possession of Korea. China’s defeat signified a shift in regional power from China to Japan, humiliating China and boosting the morale of Japan.

standard language. The majority of Japanese at this time were still illiterate, as mentioned earlier (Gottlieb 57). Nakamura, a scholar in the early Meiji Period, suggested that the people of Japan were flawed with the following characteristics.

The people rooted in servitude, the people who are arrogant toward their inferiors and flattering toward their superiors, the ignorant and uneducated people, the people who love sake and sex, the people who do not like reading, the people who do not reflect on their duties and who know not the laws of Heaven, the people of shallow wisdom and limited capacity, the people who avoid toil and do not endure hardships, the egocentric people who practice cheap tricks, the people without perseverance and diligence in character, the frivolous and shallow people who are without principles in their hearts, the people who like to rely on others as they are without a spirit of independence, the people who are poor in their powers of thought and perception, the people who know not the value of money, the people who break promises without honoring loyalty, the people who are unable to act together and have but a slim capacity for friendship, and the people who do not strive for new inventions. (302)

He then suggested “if we desire to change the people’s character and thereby encourage elevated conduct and virtuous feelings, we will accomplish absolutely nothing if we only reform the political structure” (Nakamura 373), and added that the only way to change people is through education. A problem with this was that not many people could become sufficiently educated with the current state of access and interest in education.

Language was also an issue, because as modernization was rapidly encroaching, many new concepts developed that required new language to describe them. These new words were often constructed so as to reinforce nationalism. For example, *kokugo* (国語), meaning national language, was widely used to refer to the

Japanese language; *hyôjungo*,<sup>3</sup> was another term that referred to its status as the standard language (Shimoda 721). The concept of civilization, or *bunmei*, also made its entrance into Japanese language and thought (Gluck 254-255). Other types of new words were needed more because new technology was being invented and brought into Japan, but even some of these words exhibit reference to nationalism. Because the new words had an intended audience, this often resulted in creating new differences between dialects, especially between those dialects that were based on class or rural and urban differences. However, over time these “elements confined to a few became the property of many (247-248)” because the level of interaction was increasing even between the aforementioned very separate groups. Importantly, this ideological Japan that was being described in new language did not necessarily already exist. It was more of a goal that leaders and scholars thought was important to achieve. Language was then the tool for creating the groundwork for the changes to occur, allowing for people to conceptualize the new ideas because they now had a way to describe them, though most of the changes were realized after the language describing them had already been developed (Gluck 262-263).

### **Attitudes Toward Standardization**

At the dawn of the Meiji Era, the attitude towards dialects shifted dramatically. This was in large part due to the influence of certain scholars who had recently studied in Western countries and came to be influenced by Western ideas regarding language. It was a well-accepted idea in the West that “linguistic

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<sup>3</sup> The kanji used in the word *hyôjungo* are 標 (*hyô*) meaning emblem, 準 (*jun*) meaning conform, and 語 (*go*) meaning language.

stabilization [was] a precursor to modernization (Wetzel 45).” Ueda Kazutoshi<sup>4</sup> was instrumental in bringing these ideas back to Japan and carrying them out, first through his writings and eventually as an official government policy maker. He, among others, proposed the idea to Japan that linguistic unity was essential for the unity of the nation (Shimoda 721). This was because of the increased interaction that would need to occur in a unified nation, the ability to spread information throughout the country, and the spread of ideas through ideological words. Instead of the general acceptance of dialects that existed only a short time before, suddenly these scholars were proclaiming that the dialects were “vulgar” and embarrassing and needed to be eradicated. Another scholar, Setsu, stated this opinion very clearly in his writing entitled *Hôgen kairyôron* (方言改良論 *On Rectifying Dialects*) (Shimoda 723).

Japan underwent a transition leading into the Meiji Era that caused leaders to call for the standardization of Japanese. Instead of being made up of only loosely united groups of people that had no significant reason to rectify the linguistic variations, they began to see a standard language as a necessary thing in order to progress in the world. Reasons for this change include the centralization of power

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<sup>4</sup> Ueda Kazutoshi (1867-1937) studied Europe where he was influenced by the Western scholars he studied under and with. He was responsible for spreading these ideas in Japan as well as training some of the other leading scholars and was eventually given authority over the process of language standardization.

in Tokyo as a result of the restoration of the emperor, Western influence, increased interaction within Japan, and the desire to create a powerful nation.



## Methods of Change

With the question of how language should change to fit with the changes in society raised (as discussed in Chapter 1), a variety of groups formed to advocate the changes that each group thought would be best for the nation. The methods used to determine and spread the standardized form of the language are significant to the transformation in the national perception that occurred. These methods were very deliberately executed for specific reasons. Surveys spread throughout the main island show what the language reformers were doing in order to create the best possible standard language.

### **Genbun Itchi** (言文一致)

*Genbun itchi* was the idea that the spoken and written language should be the same. Those inclined toward *genbun itchi* favored forming the standard language around the colloquial speech of Tokyo. In *The Ideology of Kokugo* (2010), Yeongsuk Lee discusses the development of ideas concerning the *genbun itchi* movement, including the writings of several scholars of the time on *genbun itchi*. One such scholar is Basil Hall Chamberlain (1850-1935), a professor at Tokyo

Imperial University; his emphasis on the social impact would aid Japan in becoming an advanced nation. Mozume Takami (1847-1928), professor of literature at Tokyo Imperial University and author of *Genbun Itchi*, questioned the usage sentence endings and politeness levels to be used in writing (Lee 42).

In *Language and Society in Japan*, Nanette Gottlieb draws attention to another major reason for the development of *genbun itchi* as the emergence of modern Japanese novels. After studying Western literature, Tsubouchi Shôyô (1859-1935) wanted to change Japanese novels, which were previously looked down upon by educated people. He published *Shôsetsu Shinzui* (The Essence of the Novel) between 1885 and 1886 to reform the Japanese novel (Gottlieb 1972: 2). In one section, Shôyô writes about possible ways for the writing style to change in order to better suit novels because the novel “must make appropriate allowances for changes in language, and strike out in new directions, because the stuff of which the novel is made is the portrayal of contemporary human nature and behavior” (31). He draws out the shortcomings of *wabun*, the classical style, saying that it is better “suited to euphemistic, elegant prose” but “it lacks a needed air of animation and grandeur” (30). Instead, he proposed that colloquial style can do what traditional styles could not for a novel (33). Interestingly, although he addresses inconsistencies in the Japanese language, this motivation for changing the language based on spoken Japanese does not consider the practicality in uses of language other than the novel.

Shôyô made a significant impact on people such as Futabatei Shimei (1864-1909), a realist style author and literary critic, who thought that basing their writing on spoken Japanese would allow them to “properly express issues of identity and change” that they wanted to write about given the changing times (Gottlieb 2005: 44). Futabatei’s first novel that he wrote in this style, entitled *Ukigumo*, is considered the first novel to really experiment with this new style of writing. Towards the beginning of the novel, the writing makes “greater use of traditional forms than do the later chapters; by the time he reached the third and final part of his novel, he had developed a narrative style which is far closer to present-day colloquial Japanese than anything written by his contemporaries” (Ryan 85).

### **Kokugo Chôsa Iinkai (National Language Research Council)**

*Ueda Kazutoshi* (1867-1937)

Ueda Kazutoshi was a scholar who studied linguistics under Basil Hall Chamberlain and later in Germany and France. As a result of his studies in Europe, the West influenced Ueda Kazutoshi’s ideas about the importance of language in relation to successful modernization. He reflected this in his 1985 paper *Hyôjungo ni tsukite* (Regarding Standard Language), which drew the conclusion that “because advanced European countries like England, Germany, France, and Italy had in due course developed and established standard languages, it behooved Japan to nurture a beautiful, polished standard language as well” (Wetzel 45). In addition, he became the president of Kokugakuin University later in his life beginning in 1927. Because Kokugakuin educates Shinto priests, Ueda must have had a strong connection with

Shintoism. In the bigger picture, Shinto was a key element in developing Japanese nationalism as Shintoism's origins are within Japan. On the other hand, because Buddhism was a foreign influence associated with China, it was rejected in the drive towards a unified Japan. Therefore, Ueda's ideas on the standard language, given his connection with Shintoism, was influenced not only by Western education but also by the idea used to elevate Shintoism above Buddhism that foreign, especially Chinese, influence needed to be purged from Japan.

Ueda decided to play an active role in affecting the Japanese language for this reason. Like *genbun itchi*, Ueda Kazutoshi thought the standard language (both written and spoken) should reflect the Tokyo dialect. However, he felt that using the colloquial language without ridding it of its imperfections was a bad idea. Instead, he favored the dialect of the middle class in Tokyo, allowing for revisions because of "some shortcomings in the Tokyo language before making it the *hyôjungo*" (Lee 99). Applying his version of *genbun itchi*, he formed *Gengo Gakkai* (言語学会、Linguistic Society) in 1898 and the next year the government created the *Kokugo Chôsakai* (国語調査会、National Language Inquiry Board) that signified the government's intent to intervene in the development of the national language (Inoue 88). By 1902, the *Kokugo Chôsa linkai* (国語調査委員会、National Language Research Council) was formed as a part of the Ministry of Education, under the leadership of Ueda.

*Kokugo Chôsa linkai*

The main objectives of the *linkai* were to investigate the value of *kana* and *romaji* as scripts for the new writing system, find ways for *genbun itchi* to be put into general use, examine the language's phonetic system, and survey the dialects and select the one best suited for becoming the standard language (Inoue 88-9).

Learning about the ideas obtained from the West, Japanese scholars were more aware of the ways in which language develops. One way is the natural evolution of language. This occurs as the result of changes in society such as a change in government structure, changing literacy, and changing interactions. Some of the Kokugo Chôsa linkai<sup>5</sup> were in favor of letting this natural process happen as a result of the changes made in other capacities. However, many members of the linkai thought that this would take far too long and Japan would never be able to catch up with the West if they did not speed things up. As Aoda Setsu, a member of the linkai, recommended, "We cannot wait for the natural improvement of dialects. Human effort must be added" (Shimoda 724). Also, if time was not an issue, having the language develop on its own raised the risk of a poorly organized language that was neither sophisticated nor practical. Therefore, it was decided that deliberative action must take place in order to rapidly change the language in the most desirable way possible.

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<sup>5</sup> The Kokugo Chôsa linkai was an official committee under the Ministry of Education created to research Japanese languages for the purpose of creating a new standard Japanese language.

But to what extent was it the nation's new leaders that became the driving force behind the standardization of Japanese? Was it also driven by natural causes such as increased interaction? Some have seen the language shift from a more natural flow of events, though when looking at all the evidence, it seems impossible to conclude that natural language development was the major cause. Scholars of the time clearly stated the intent for deliberately engaging in the process to create a standard language. However, Wetzel suggests that the two are not entirely incompatible (44). While national committees strove to create a standard language, the selected form and words had to be chosen because people around the nation were already beginning to use them more than others, largely due to the new centrality of Tokyo resulting in a natural gravitation towards those forms as opposed to official implementation methods.

### *Surveys*

Although the linkai decided that a single standardized form of Japanese was required for the modernization of Japan, little was actually known about the many different dialects across Japan. Though dialect dictionaries existed (Shimoda 718), there was still a lack of a cohesive record of the different words and grammar structures (particularly verb attachments<sup>6</sup>) used in each one. Also, Western ideas gave Japanese scholars the motivation to try approaching problems from a scientific method. For these reasons, the linkai, led by Ueda Kazutoshi, set about trying to study the various dialects of Japan so that they could determine the best possible

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<sup>6</sup> The Japanese language relies heavily on the addition of endings (completing inflections) to verbs at the end of the sentence for creating different meanings (i.e. tenses, requests).

standard form of the language (Wetzel 46-47). Being statistical in nature, surveys seemed to be the rational way of making this kind of decision. The linkai was looking for words and structures that were the most widely used, the most sophisticated, and that would serve the intended purposes. The latter includes different levels of politeness, for example.

Surveys were given to schoolteachers throughout Japan (Wetzel 48). This was partly for practical reasons as the schoolteachers would actually be capable of reading the surveys and so that they would have a manageable amount of surveys with which to deal. However, those surveyed were likely chosen because of their rank in society as well. The speech of commoners was not considered to any large degree due to the relatively new opinions of its crassness that was discussed in the first chapter and earlier in this chapter.

An early survey determining the usage of various polite forms of speech was handed out in 1903 (Wetzel 47). This survey, however, was flawed because the language researchers still did not understand the dialects well enough, causing them to receive inadequate results, so they handed out another one in 1908 (48). The section on *keigo* (polite language)<sup>7</sup> and the comments the linkai made on it are particularly revealing. The survey provides different forms for different levels of politeness and situations and asks the person taking the survey what forms they use or recognize. The following excerpts from this survey show some of the variations

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<sup>7</sup> At the time, the idea of *keigo* was still in formation and was designated for the purpose of this survey and its findings.

between which the surveyors were trying to determine. It was made clear in the findings that the forms to be used were based on the Tokyo dialect.

*Watakushi mo kaimasu.*

I will also buy it.

*Watakushi mo mairimasu.*

I will also go.

*Okashi-moshimasu.*

I will borrow it.

*Watakushi ga o-hanashi-moshimasu.*

I will speak.

*Kono gohon wo chotto o-kari-moshimasu.*

I will borrow this book for a bit.

*Kono tegami o yonde kudasai.*

Please read this letter.

*Tegami o kaite kudasai.*

Please write a letter.

*Hon o kashite tsukaasai.*

Please lend me a book.

*Tegami o kaite okureyasu.*

Please write a letter.<sup>8</sup>

(qtd. in Wetzel 47-48)

In the first set, each sentence represents a different way to humble one's speech when speaking to a superior. The second set is a selection of different ways to politely make a request. Some of these forms (in these cases, mostly the ones appearing towards the beginning in each list) are common in standard Japanese while others have been discarded.

Particularly interesting is the new focus on incorporating polite forms. This connects to the sentiment that the scholars had regarding the colloquial speech. "Vulgarity was the charge most often and most bitterly leveled by the detractors of

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<sup>8</sup> The underlined portions are the variations in question.



colloquial style, who saw the use of any part of the spoken language in writing except certain parts of the lexicon as an offence in itself" (Twine: 1988, 30).

Therefore, the *Kokugo Chôsa linkai* tended to favor the more polite forms for use in the standard language in hopes that the "vulgarity" of colloquial forms would become void, leaving a polished language in its place. It was thought that if a more sophisticated language became common to everyone in Japan, then Japan itself could become more respectable.

Difficulties arose not only in how little the *linkai* knew, however. When they took surveys and even just listened to the people they knew, it was evident that many people spoke combinations of different dialects, making it very challenging to determine the distinctions between the dialects (Shimoda 714). This was a problem both because there were therefore fewer well-used dialects from which they could create a standard language and because it would have made it harder to teach the standard language to everyone because there were so many varied versions of Japanese to give translations for the new aspects of Japanese that were being incorporated.

Patricia Wetzels primarily writes *Keigo in Modern Japan: Polite Language from Meiji to the Present* on the development and significance of *keigo* (honorific language), but broadens her discussion of Japanese language development to include the language in general as it is difficult to separate the two. Wetzels raises the question as to whether language standardization was a natural outcome of the transition into becoming a nation-state or if it was more complex. Based on the

“concerted governmental efforts (44),” the conclusion is that it was not such a natural transition. Shimoda provides similar information as well but from a historical perspective. Concerning the concerted effort, Wetzel goes into some detail about the government efforts established and different methods used to determine the new language (47). Surveys are covered extensively, showing practical ways that the linkai in particular tried to research and change the language. This includes sentence endings, grammar, words, and level of politeness. The complexity of trying to match the written language with the vernacular dialects is also discussed (45).

### **Opposition**

Because change in language reflects change in society at large (Gottlieb 43), those who resisted reforming the language were opposed to the proposed changes to society. Many saw the debates on how to change the language as an attack on longstanding national values, especially in relation to the writing style as it represented tradition to them (Gottlieb 46).

Tatsumi Kojiro, as he wrote in his article “*Baku Genbunitchi Ron*” (Refuting *Genbun Itchi*), opposed *genbun itchi* on the grounds that language style should change as civilization advanced and not by government interference (Lee 44-5). Also, he particularly found fault in Chamberlin’s ideas concerning the lack of consideration on the different functions of writing and speaking that would cause problems for future communication of certain types. Issues included the formality

needed for official documents, for example, which was not found in the personal, familiar communication based speaking style and that speaking was good for expressing emotion while writing had been used for learning (Twine: 1978, 345). In other words, different vocabulary and certain levels of formality separated the two. Aside from these points, he was in favor of creating the language around spoken Japanese if the disadvantages could be minimized.

### *Kenyûsha* (硯友社)

While *genbun itchi* writers were finding ways to make the written and spoken versions of Japanese the same, *kenyûsha* writers maintained the classical forms of written Japanese. *Kenyûsha* is translated as Friends of the Ink Well, with the kanji meaning inkstone, friend, and association, respectfully. The group was formed by a group of students from Tokyo University. Leaders of this society included Ozaki Kôyô (1868-1903), Ishibashi Shian (1867-1927), Maroka Kyûka (1865-1927), and Kawakami Bizan (1869-1908), who published a journal, *Garakuta Bunko*, containing the style of writing that they were promoting and criticism of other styles (Danly 54). *Kenyûsha* was at its height before the turn of the century but declined the year after Kôyô's death in 1903. The style attempts, at least when it reached its height, to bring the refined poeticism of classical Japanese to the modern Japanese novel. Generally, *kenyûsha* was opposed to the ideas that Tsubouchi Shôyô expressed. "‘Literature’ for the *kenyûsha* members meant the traditional Confucian-inspired works, but they also took pride in their familiarity with *gesaku* fiction of the early nineteenth century" (Keene 120).

*Ken'yûsha* writers enjoyed a high level of popularity in Japan's literary scene during the end of the nineteenth century, especially with the success of Kôyô's novel *Ninin Bikuni Irozange* (The Amorous Confessions of Two Nuns, 1889) (Danly 54-5). Higuchi Ichiyô (1873-1896) also chose to write in the classical style. She became one of the earliest important writers of the Meiji Period and one of the most highly regarded of modern women writers. Ichiyô creatively blended influences from the old style of entertaining novel with classical style. This is characterized by very long sentences that give her writings an oral feel, along with the use of old grammar structures such as *nari* (なり) where *desu* (です) is now used and adjectives ending in *ki* (き) instead of the current *i* (い) ending. Another writer, Yamada Bimyô (1868-1910) began writing in the traditional style, but by the late 1880s, he began using colloquial language and nontraditional forms in his poetry (Ryan 86).

These writers did not adopt the *genbun itchi* and other attempts at modernizing the written language because they were not in favor of the influences that shaped these new forms that deviated so much from traditional Japanese language. The leaders of *Ken'yûsha* were opposed to the use of writing to promote political ideas in general. They considered Westernization superficial and "shared a dislike for the mania for European culture that reached its height in 1885" (Keene 121). Instead, they desired to see a renewed focus on internal influence from the past (Ryan n.85).

Due to the need for changing the Japanese language for practical and ideological reasons, several groups took shape to put forth their ideas about the changes that should be made. The most prominent of these groups included *genbun itchi* and *kenyûsha*. A national council, the linkai, was formed and researched the linguistics of Japan for such purposes. Because they were connected to the Ministry of Education, the linkai were the most successful in bringing about the change they wanted because they could easily spread it through compulsory education, which will be further discussed in the next chapter.

## Spreading the New Standard Language

The past two chapters have delved into the causes for creating change, both because of changing times and the desires of certain groups like *genbun itchi*. This chapter will discuss the methods of spreading the new standard Japanese throughout the country and its significance in aiding the success of creating a united, “homogenous” Japan. The main methods used to disseminate the language were education and literature.

### **Education with the New Standard Japanese Language**

Once the refined language was developed, Ueda planned to spread it among the public through compulsory education (Shimoda 725). The success of *genbun itchi* was in large part due to its official status as part of the policy supported by the linkai. As the linkai was part of the Ministry of Education, the decisions made by the linkai quickly made their way into formal education (Inoue 89). A number of policies on what should be taught in schools were made as the development of language went on, beginning with small usage of *kana* and *romanji* along with the traditional *kanbun* (Lee 106). Over time, more and more elements of *genbun itchi*

were introduced into textbooks that were then spread throughout Japan under the direction of the centralized government.

### **The Spread of Standard Japanese Through Literature**

As Twine states, “a survey of the literature on both nationalism and modernization, and in particular on their sociolinguistic aspects, indicates that a standard language has an important function both in expediting the flow of information necessary to social change and in providing a focus for national pride (429).” Literature was essential in the spread of standard Japanese, and the particular types of literature and the forces that drove their creation are particularly revealing. The emphasis on literacy in turn affected national identity because of the increased access the common people had with national modernization through literature.

#### *Literary Journals*

As discussed in the previous chapter, there were several groups created during the Meiji Period that advocated respective changes to the language. Often, these groups would publish writing in an attempt to make their proposed changes known.

The early *kenyûsha* members started a journal entitled *Garakuta Bunko* (がらくた文庫、Rubbish Library/Book Collection) while they were still in college (Danly 54). At first, they created this journal just for fun as the joking title suggests, but eventually, when the journal became more important in the literature scene, the

name was changed to simply *Bunko* (Library). Although this journal was not intended for a wider audience initially, it grew to be an important means for their writings to gain a wide audience.

Aside from journals, the groups described in Chapter Two published works that highlighted the theories behind their motives rather than put the style of writing into use in novel form. Examples include Mozume Takami's *Genbun Itchi* and Tsubouchi Shôyô's *Shôsetsu Shinzui* (The Essence of the Novel).

### *Literature for the General Public*

Many other mediums of literature were employed for the purpose of teaching a wide variety of people to become literate in standard Japanese (Torrance 29). The goal was to make people interested in the literature so that they would want to be able to read it. In Osaka, the types of literature were targeted at the working class that made up the majority of the population there (34). The two major types of literature in Osaka were newspapers and popular literature, mostly narrative fiction (43). The popular literature mainly came in the form of serialized segments within the newspaper. This was especially important in Osaka because the region had such a low literacy rate, but it improved because a growing number of people (particularly the working class) found reading useful and pleasurable (Torrance 40; Gluck 172). The strategies used in Osaka were brought to other regions of Japan as well. However, in different regions, the types of literature varied according to the readership. For example, in Tokyo, magazines were much more popular than were



newspapers (Torrance 43) as they were intended for people with more literary education such as was found in Tokyo.

More important than the types of literature spread about are the themes discussed therein. Early on, the serialized stories featured themes that promoted commitment and courage. Historical fiction was often invoked, creating a tie to national pride and history. As the newspapers grew, however, they became “oriented to attracting and pleasing a mass audience through sensational violence, eroticism, and fantastic plots” (Torrance 51), showing that over time, the goal was to get a bigger audience instead of following governmental pressures to promote nationalism. However, this form of literature eventually became known as a form of national literature because of its popularity throughout Japan (52). It therefore became something that brought about unity of culture across regional boundaries.

In addition, newspapers contained opinions and discussion on the actions of the government. For example, the Osaka-based newspaper *Asahi* made judgments on the Rescript of Education.<sup>9</sup> It argued that it would only become a ritual thing and not effective in reaffirming the values of “loyalty and filial piety” that were contained within it (Gluck 154). Therefore, the newspapers contained political commentary on the best ways to enforce these kinds of values.

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<sup>9</sup> The Rescript on Education was a national pledge emphasizing Confucian values that students were required to recite with the intention of uniting the values of everyone in the country.

## Regional Opposition and Its Failures

Richard Torrence's informative article "Literacy and Literature in Osaka, 1890-1940" looks at how one region within Japan reacted to the standardization of the Japanese language. Torrence emphasizes the importance of literature in spreading literacy during the transition period. This places Torrence's article among others like Wetzell and Shimoda because it discusses how the standardized form of Japanese was spread practically. Torrence differs from the other sources in that shortcomings and failures of the standardization to fully integrate every region into a united national identity are examined.

In a broad sense, this failure sheds light on the attitude the more general population (as opposed to the national leaders and the linkai) had in relation to the changes taking place towards a centralized, modern Japan. The desire to have pride over regional characteristics remained, and still remains in some ways today. As long as people were also able to understand *hyōjungo* along with their local variations, however, it did not create enough of a problem for further action to change the dialects.

In order to spread the language, various groups published literature in the style they hoped to become the new norm. These writings took on several different forms, each with its own audience and intention, and although they were not always what the officials wanted, they were instrumental in shaping a largely unified

national identity. In the end, *genbun itchi* won out because of the authority their association with the Ministry of Education gave them.

## Conclusion

After looking at how and why the language changed, the standard language's relationship with national identity can be better deduced. Japan went through a period of change both socially and politically, and as a result, people worked to bring about ways of confronting and adapting to these changes. In the case of language, with the shift in power and eradication of traditional society, the language needed to change to match it as discussed in the first chapter. The shift towards a national language was not only a slow, natural change typical of languages during periods of new contact, but language was changed deliberately as a tool to create a new sense of nationalism. Brian McVeigh goes into depth about how Japanese nationalism was created and managed throughout modern history. The later efforts towards nationalism show how the ideologies that created the standardization of language earlier on may have transformed Japan in later times as well. Motivations given include “ideological centralization (60)” and creating a “people” to be ruled over (160-1). People tried to manipulate the language to create the changes that they wanted to see take place—for example, the members of *genbun itchi* and *kenyûsha* proposed their respective ideas about what they thought it should mean to be Japanese and what changes in the language would best reflect the most beneficial

way for the country to move forward in the world. Changes to the language were then spread out to the whole country through the education system and literature. Japan became united under this newly contrived standard language system that did not reflect the majority of Japan prior to the Meiji Period. Mark Hudson's *Ruins of Identity: Ethnogenesis in the Japanese Islands* reflects this change that occurred. Hudson's objective is to discover the ancient origins of Japan, how the Japanese perceived their society, and why things changed over time. In particular, it aims to break down the idea of a homogenous Japan that has been widely accepted in the past. The standardization of Japanese played a significant role in creating this type of mentality. It briefly looks into how the Japanese went from seeing people from other parts of Japan as foreigners (340), to their own group of people, to the perception of a historical homogeneity that became popular during the Meiji period and continues to the present.

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