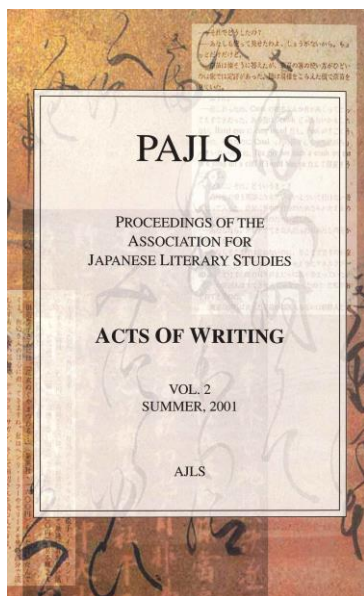


“Rhetoric as Metalanguage and the Metalanguage of Rhetoric: How Language Defines and is Defined in the Scholarship of Rhetoric of the Meiji and Taishō Periods”

Massimiliano Tomasi

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**RHETORIC AS METALANGUAGE AND THE METALANGUAGE
OF RHETORIC: HOW LANGUAGE DEFINES AND IS DEFINED
IN THE SCHOLARSHIP OF RHETORIC OF
THE MEIJI AND TAISHÔ PERIODS**

MASSIMILIANO TOMASI

The search for a modern form of written expression, also referred to here as the "question of language," was among the most discussed issues of the Meiji period. Broadly speaking, this issue was not necessarily confined to literature. With the coming of the modern age and the increased need for exchange of knowledge and information, the choice of words and style and the understanding of their relationship to the reader came to assume an unprecedented relevance not only in the domain of literary production but also in that of communication in general.

In a sense, however, this language-centered debate was especially pertinent to the realm of literature. Centuries of literary tradition had reinforced the primacy of classical language to the extent that the vernacular was now widely regarded as unsuited to literary production. Classical language was perceived as permanent and changeless and as something that could be described by a system of rules. On the other hand, the vernacular was thought of as being verbose, vulgar, devoid of refinement and regularity.

Notwithstanding, in the early years of the Meiji period, some scholars and intellectuals began to assert the importance of the spoken language. They called for a simplification of literary style and laid the foundation for what later came to be known as the *genbun itchi* (言文一致) movement (the movement for the unification of the spoken with the written language). Of course, the advocates of the vernacularization of written language faced strong resistance from those who argued in favor of the elegance and tradition of classical prose styles. This debate became the core of a discourse on language that addressed the feasibility of a modern form of literary language based on the vernacular. Such a discourse was carried out by means of a metalanguage that, as

such, should have offered an objective and scientific platform for discussion, without partiality or preference for any style.¹

This metalanguage, however, while supposedly above the parties involved, was itself influenced by certain historical contingencies. As is known, each of the written styles still used after the Meiji Restoration existed almost as an independent system, each with its own rhetorical repertoire and literary heritage. Meiji literary metalanguage was often a combination of elements from these different styles; it varied considerably, stylistically, from author to author, and thus was as transient as the language it was seeking to describe. It is then difficult to conceive how a language that was prone to continuing stylistic change could become an objective tool for the discussion of the stylistic prerequisites of a modern written language.

Yet, Meiji metalinguistic discourse on the question of language is intuitively of special importance to the formation of modern literary style. This investigation is generally concerned with that discourse; but it is especially interested in the specific discourse carried out within the field of rhetoric, a discipline that was actively involved in the debate over the creation of a modern literary language. The purpose of this study is primarily to discuss rhetoric's engagement in that debate and concurrently address the problem of metalanguage in the literary discourse of the Meiji period.

THE INTRODUCTION OF WESTERN RHETORIC TO JAPAN

The history of Western rhetoric in Japan has been quite overlooked thus far.² Introduced as a coherent system to Japan soon after

¹ The term generally refers to a "second language" that would establish the validity of the propositions contained in the language that is being discussed. See the section entitled "Concept and Problem of Metalanguage" for further discussion on the concept of metalanguage.

² The term "Western rhetoric" refers to that system of rules for effective speaking that was developed in ancient Greece and that over the centuries came to be applied to the realm of elegant writing. This investigation specifically contemplates this latter notion of rhetoric; hence, the term refers here to that complex of rules and principles regarding language, style and logical argumentation that was inherited from the Western

the Meiji Restoration, rhetoric thrived first as the art of speech and later as the art of composition.³ The first native treatise of rhetoric to be published was Takada Sanae (高田早苗, 1860-1938)'s *Bijigaku* (美辞学 [Rhetoric]). Appearing in 1889, *Bijigaku* initiated a strong tradition of studies of rhetoric at Waseda University, culminating in the works of Shimamura Hôgetsu (島村抱月, 1871-1918) and Igarashi Chikara (五十嵐力, 1874-1947), who, today, are widely considered as the most prominent modern Japanese rhetoricians.⁴

Studies of rhetoric were very popular in the last decade of the nineteenth century; its popularity in the years when the debate over *genbun itchi* intensified makes one wonder whether the discipline contributed in some fashion to the quest for a modern written language. Scholars have thus far generally diminished rhetoric's role in this debate

tradition and that constituted an essential component in the development of a native theory of composition during the Meiji period.

³ Fukuzawa Yukichi (福沢諭吉, 1835-1901) is widely regarded as the pioneer of public speaking in Japan. He introduced speech-making within the *Meirokeisha* (明六社) circle and also financed the construction of the *Mita enzetsu kaikan* (三田演説会館) in 1874, a hall entirely conceived for the practice of the art of speech. Likewise, Ozaki Yukio (尾崎行雄, 1858-1954) was also instrumental in the spread of public speaking in the very early stages of its introduction, having published the first work of rhetoric in Japan; see Ozaki Yukio, *Kôkai enzetsuhô* (公会演説法), in *Ozaki Yukio zenshû* (尾崎行雄全集), vol. 1. On the other hand, Kikuchi Dairoku (菊池大麓, 1855-1917) contributed to the spread of interest in composition and literary criticism, which blossomed over the last decade of the nineteenth century. His *Shûji oyobi kabun* (修辭及華文) was the translation of Robert and William Chambers's "Rhetoric and Belles Lettres," a piece that had appeared in the encyclopedia *Information for the People*. See *Meiji bunka zenshû* (明治文化全集), vol. 12.

⁴ Shimamura Hôgetsu, *Shinbijigaku* (新美辞学); Igarashi Chikara, *Shin bunshô kôwa* (新文章講話). The interest in rhetoric was not confined to Waseda University, but also extended to such circles as Tokyo Imperial University, and to the *bundan* in general. See also Fuzanbô (富山房)'s *Bunshô soshikihô* (文章組織法); Hattori Motohiko (服部元彦)'s *Shûjigaku* (修辭学); Hagino Yoshiyuki (萩野由之)'s *Sakubunpô* (作文法); Owada Takeki (大和田建樹)'s *Shûjigaku* (修辭学); and Takeshima Hagaromo (武島羽衣)'s *Shûjigaku* (修辭学).

on the assumption that rhetoric, in principle, worked against the creation of a modern form of written expression based on the vernacular. In spite of its popularity, rhetoric was perceived by many Meiji scholars and authors as anachronistic and incapable of reconciling its taxonomic nature with the notion of artistic freedom in writing. It was especially criticized by the younger generation of scholars and writers who were strongly influenced by such contemporary Western literary theories as Realism and Naturalism, calling in those years for the abolition of precepts and literary dogmatism. Because those young writers eventually played a crucial role in the creation of a new written language based on the vernacular, modern scholars have understood—perhaps mistakenly—that rhetoric was indeed antithetical to the development of a colloquial literary language.

While rhetoric contributed in fact remarkably to the development of modern literary language, the scholars' notion of rhetoric as a field of study that did not fully support the *genbun itchi* movement is partly justified. This study will seek to explain why.

CONCEPT AND PROBLEM OF METALANGUAGE

The concept of metalanguage was first proposed by the Polish logician Alfred Tarski in *Logic, Semantics, Metamathematics*. According to Tarski, one must always distinguish between the language *about which* one speaks and the one *in which* one speaks. The language in which one speaks becomes then a higher-order system, i.e. a metalanguage, which is employed to describe a language that cannot otherwise describe itself.

This concept of metalanguage was later applied to other fields. Louis Hjelmslev is said to have been the first to introduce the term in linguistics.⁵ When addressing the coincidence of two semantic systems, Hjelmslev differentiated between a connotative semiotic and a metasemiotic. A connotative semiotic was a semiotic where the content

⁵ In *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*. The use of the term metalanguage, however, is not confined to the cases discussed above, but has been later generalized and applied to a variety of other fields. See Fernando Lusi Lara, "Une critique du concept de métalangage," and Josette Rey Debove, *Le Métalangage: étude linguistique du discours sur le langage*.

plane represented the expression plane of a second semiotic; a metasemiotic, on the other hand, was a semiotic where the content plane represented the content of a second semiotic. The first type of semiotic is a semiotic where an expression conveys information both on the denotative and the connotative plane (as, for example, in figurative language); the second type is instead the case when language speaks about another language, i.e. the case of metalanguage (as, for example, when speaking about the language of music, art, or language itself, etc.).⁶

This second type of semiotic is of primary concern in this investigation; in this case, metalanguage speaks about language and addresses some of its aspects in an explicit, direct manner. One can however conceive of a situation in which such metalanguage extends its discourse from an explicit onto an implicit plane, thus giving birth to a more complex type of semiotic. Barthes has called this case a "three-system ensemble," as in the case of a fashion magazine where language speaks about the code of fashion on the denotative plane, but also extends its discourse onto the connotative level, when entering, for example, the realm of figurative signification.⁷ Interestingly, this type of semiotic configuration seems to be that of Japanese rhetoric's discourse on language.

Rhetoric's discourse had as (part of) its object the language employed in the literature of late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In this type of discourse, rhetoric functioned as a metalanguage in that it addressed issues regarding the object language, specifically, the stylistic options available to authors and their relevance to the quest for a modern literary language. At the same time, rhetoric's discourse on the object language was never solely on a denotative plane, but also made implications on a connotative level. On this level, rhetoric's discourse made a further statement on the question of language through the employment of stylistic features that connoted a preference for a specific style over others.

⁶ Connotative semiotics and metasemiotics have been later addressed by semioticians and literary critics. For a discussion of connotative semiotics, see, for example, Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*. On metasemiotics, see Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System*.

⁷ Barthes, 27-41.

Thus, in this investigation, the expression "rhetoric as metalanguage" refers to rhetoric's metalinguistic function when addressing the question of language; while the expression the "metalanguage of rhetoric" indicates the stylistic features of the language employed by rhetoric to carry out such a metalinguistic function.

How did rhetoric's discourse then differ from other types of discourse on language? The literary works of the period endorsed either a classical or colloquial style primarily on a connotative, implicit level. Thus, for example, Futabatei Shimei (二葉亭四迷, 1864-1909)'s *Ukigumo* (浮雲 [Floating Clouds]) made a literary statement that went beyond its fictional content; the language used in the novel was an implicit declaration of Futabatei's support of the vernacular as literary language. Likewise, Ozaki Kôyô (尾崎紅葉, 1868-1903)'s *Konjiki yasha* (金色夜叉 [The Golden Demon]) also pronounced itself on the issue, employing however a type of language that connoted Kôyô's preference for a classical literary style. It is evident that even if in these works Futabatei and Kôyô did not speak on the question of language, the language they employed spoke for them, and thus represented, in an implicit manner, their theoretical stand in the debate.

In contrast to novels, rhetoric endorsed a specific literary style both explicitly and implicitly, by means of a metasemiotic that addressed the question of language, and a metalanguage that connoted a preference for one style over others. Of course, other types of discourse on language took this same type of configuration. For example, Futabatei's own recounting of how he came to write in a *genbun itchi* style could be considered a discourse of this type, where both the stylistic features and the content of the discourse indicated a preference for a specific style (i.e. *genbun itchi*).⁸ Rhetoric, however, constituted a coherent and more defined discursive entity that could be recognized on the basis of common historical and disciplinary traits. Furthermore, its arrival to Japan epitomized the encounter with the Western world and its scholarly heritage, and with it the ongoing dilemma between assimilation of foreign knowledge and reappraisal of indigenous culture. Its discourse is then one whose contribution to the question of language is of special relevance to the literary developments of the Meiji period.

⁸ Futabatei, 171-72.

It is now necessary to ask whether and how a metalanguage can influence the object of its discourse. Two types of considerations seem to be germane to this investigation. The first one is that the metalanguage cannot avoid being influenced by the intellectual climate of the period; the second is that the language each critic chooses is as much a product of his/her age, as the outcome of a choice he/she deliberately makes on the basis of a certain belief system or particular socio-ethical and esthetic values.⁹

These two considerations indicate that, indeed, any type of metalinguistic discourse does not only create new knowledge, but also poses a number of limitations to the language that is being described, since it is within that metalanguage that the object language must be defined. The metalanguage adds new scientific knowledge regarding the object language, but it cannot avoid defining that language according to the socio-political and esthetic values that support it. From this point of view, it is possible to assume that Meiji metalinguistic discourse on language (rhetoric's, in particular) must have also affected the process of creating a modern written language. A discourse supportive of a specific written style, for example, may have significantly contributed to the establishment of that style, given the popularity of rhetoric in the years at the turn of the century.

But how did Meiji rhetoricians handle their metalanguage? And how did that metalanguage define language? This investigation will focus on the scholarly production that went from the publication of Takada Sanae's *Bijigaku* to the end of the Meiji era, a period that can be regarded as the "golden age" of rhetorical investigation in Japan.

RHETORIC AS METALANGUAGE AND THE METALANGUAGE OF RHETORIC

The last years of the 1880s and the early 1890s were probably the most significant and productive for the debate on the question of

⁹ These two points have been discussed in Konrad Koerner, "The Problem of Metalanguage in Linguistic Historiography," and in Barthes, "What is Criticism?"

language. Futabatei Shimei and Yamada Bimyô (山田美妙, 1868-1910) published the first literary works written in the colloquial, while scholars, including Bimyô himself, argued at length in favor of a reappraisal of the spoken language. It was during these years of major change that rhetoric joined the debate over the creation of a modern form of literary expression.

The aforementioned *Bijigaku* by Takada Sanae dealt extensively with language, especially in matters of style, offering also a substantial treatment of rhetorical figures.¹⁰ However, the most interesting aspect of the work was that it made no mention of the *genbun itchi* movement. This significant work's failure to address the question of language is intriguing, albeit probably not accidental. This position was, in fact, common among the works published later in the decade, which either disregarded the new trends in literature or exclusively supported classical prose styles. Hattori Motohiko (服部元彦) asserted that "when we express thoughts and feelings using colloquial language, we cannot call this writing; the *genbun itchi* style now in fashion in novels is a clear example of that. From a rhetorical point of view it should be called conversation notes rather than writing."¹¹ Hagino Yoshiyuki (萩野由之, 1860-1924) stated that "if writing were no more than expressing what one has heard or seen, it would be equivalent to having a conversation; *genbun itchi* is so verbose, vulgar and without literary taste, that it would be better to use the classical rather than the spoken style."¹² Sassa Masakazu (佐々政一, 1872-1917), while declaring that the object of his study was the standard written language of the time, held that *genbun itchi* did not provide an appropriate model in this regard.¹³

Thus, most scholars of rhetoric believed in the supremacy of classical language and the transience of the vernacular. This negative

¹⁰ On Takada Sanae's *Bijigaku* see Massimiliano Tomasi, "Studies of Western Rhetoric in Modern Japan: The Years between Takada Sanae's *Bijigaku* and the Turn of the Century."

¹¹ Hattori, 11.

¹² Hagino, 30.

¹³ Hayamizu Hiroshi (速水博司), 168.

attitude toward the vernacular may be partially explained by the fact that the last decade of the century saw a revival of traditional cultural values, which in literature took the form of a return to the classics. Such a climate may have influenced rhetoric's discourse on language, thus characterizing its metalinguistic discourse as conservative, and possibly contributing to its image as an archaic and obsolete field of study.

It was only in 1902 that rhetoric began to address the question of language in a different fashion. In his work *Shinbijigaku* (新美辞学 [New Rhetoric]), Shimamura Hôgetsu advocated the importance of rhetorical devices in the sentence, thus reasserting the basic view held by rhetoricians on the centrality of rhetoric in a theory of composition. However, at the same time he endorsed the possibility of creating a style that was based on the vernacular.¹⁴ According to Hôgetsu, the acceptance of a literary style based on the vernacular implied the commitment to the creation of rhetorical devices typical only of the spoken language. This notion was extremely important because it acknowledged the vernacular as an independent language system that had its own mechanisms and rules and that, as such, was neither superior nor inferior to classical language. Hôgetsu became then the promoter of a stylistic compromise that valued the presence of classical elements but also endorsed the vernacular as literary language.

A few years later, Igarashi Chikara's *Shin bunshô kôwa* (新文章講話 [New Lectures on Writing]) sanctioned the new progressive character of rhetoric's discourse on the question of language. In the early pages of his work, Igarashi pointed to the development of a new trend in writing that condemned embellishments and favored a plain and direct style without ornaments or exaggerations; this new style was realistic in nature and as such eschewed the authority and prestige of old classical conventions, in favor of a colloquial usage that better conveyed the subtleties of modern life. Examples from leading contemporary authors such as Futabatei Shimei, Natsume Sôseki (夏目漱石, 1867-1916) and Tayama Katai (田山花袋, 1872-1930) illustrated the potential of this new style and with it the new status of the vernacular, which had now

¹⁴ According to Hôgetsu, going back to the spoken language was not the final goal, but rather the point of departure for the creation of a new literary language. Shimamura, 77.

gained ground not only in the dialogical but also in the discursive portions of the literary text.

Igarashi supported the establishment of this new form of expression, but also argued that a crucial misunderstanding had characterized the debate on the creation of a modern literary style. He observed that "after the word artless has become a key word of the new style, many have begun to think that this means complete absence of rhetorical devices, but this is a groundless theory."¹⁵ Naturalist writers were especially adamant about this notion, but examples from writers like Shimazaki Tôson (島崎藤村, 1872-1943) and Tayama Katai indicated that those very authors also made an extensive use of rhetorical devices, as was reasonable to expect. Igarashi's conclusion was that the difference between old and new style did not lie in the presence or absence of rhetorical devices, but in the very nature of those devices.¹⁶ After all, Igarashi argued, writing without rhetorical devices was itself an extreme rhetorical artifice.¹⁷

Thus, rhetoric's discourse on language went from being extremely conservative during the last decade of the nineteenth century to becoming supportive of a realistic literary style devoid of embellishments in the early years of the twentieth century. Interestingly enough, this transition can also be observed within its metalanguage. In fact, all the major works of rhetoric published between *Bijigaku* and the turn of the century employed a metalanguage that was strongly reminiscent of classical literary conventions, which was consistent with their conservative stand in matters of literary style:

余は前篇に於て先ず人の嗜好及び嗜好の満足を来す可べき三種の原素則ち崇高と優美と可笑とを論じ次に文章の修飾法を述べ終わりに文体と文体に欠く可らざる要素のことに講じたり是皆文章全般に渉れる事項なりしなり今此の篇に於いては文章の種類を示し特に各の種類に関係したる事項を論究せんとするなり。

¹⁵ Igarashi, 10-11.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

In the previous volume I have discussed taste and the three elements that bring about the gratification of taste, namely "the sublime," "the beautiful," and "the ridiculous." Next, I discussed rhetorical figures and finally style and the necessary attributes of style. These were essential components of writing in general. In this volume, I shall indicate the types of style and discuss topics related to each of them.¹⁸

修辞学は文章を修成する方法を教える学科なり言文一致の国にては談話の修成にも亦此の学科を適用す（中略）修辞学を研究して得る所の利益は能く自己の文章を修成し得る事のみに止まらず能く他人の文章の善悪巧拙を識別すべき標準も定むる事を得べきなり。

Rhetoric is a science that teaches how to polish writing; this science is also applied to speaking, in those countries where the spoken and the written language coincide... The merits coming from the study of rhetoric are not limited to polishing the elements of one's writing, but extend to the establishment of a standard for the appreciation of others' writing as well.¹⁹

文章の盛んならざりし時代、修辞学が単に雄弁法の義とせられしは理の当さに然るべきところ、然れども、文明の増進するに従い、印刷その他の諸術開けて、文章の旺盛になるに至り、其の範囲漸次に拡張せられて遂に今日の如く詩歌といはず、談論といはず、批判といはず、凡ての言語的表彰をふくめるものとなり。

In an age when writing was not yet widespread, it was natural that rhetoric should be perceived simply as the art of speech. However, with the advancement of civilization, and the development of printing and other techniques, writing came to

¹⁸ Takada, 2.

¹⁹ Hattori, 1.

assume a major relevance. Its scope gradually widened so that today it is not limited to poetry, speech or criticism, but rather includes all possible linguistic forms of expressions.²⁰

In 1902, Shimamura Hôgetsu's prose already employed several contemporary linguistic features, but classical elements continued to abound. *Shinbijigaku's* metalanguage was, in a way, a stylistically syncretic language, which reflected Hôgetsu's theoretical position of compromise between colloquial and classical styles.

古体即ち文章体を棄てて、今体即ち口語体に合すべきなり。され共、其の言に帰るは、再終点にあらずして、発足点なることを忘るべからず。吾人はこれよりして二条の針路を見いだすべし。一は修辞の力によりてさらに言を離れ文に入らんことなり。しかも其の文は前の古文なるべからざるや論なし。二は古体の語法の修辞中より、或ものを抜き留むるの必要のあることなり。

It is necessary to abandon the old style, i.e. classical language, and conform with the present style, i.e. modern language. However, it must not be forgotten that going back to the spoken language should not be the final goal but rather a new point of departure. Here I see the following course of action: first, depart from the colloquial and move on toward written language through the employment of rhetorical features; and it goes without saying that the written language meant here is not classical language. Second, retain some rhetorical features of the old grammar.²¹

In Igarashi Chikara's *Shin bunshô kôwa* one can finally find substantial agreement between the content of a metalinguistic discourse that fully supported the vernacular, and the metalanguage itself.

²⁰ Takeshima, 2.

²¹ Shimamura, 77.

此の頃、我が国の文章、広くいえば文芸全般の上に一大革新が起こっている。外ではない、在来の文章に付き物であった、否、殆どこれが無ければ文章でないともまで信ぜられた、しつっこい、持って廻った、ひねくれた、こしらえたような、く附けたような、わざとらしい修飾を斥けて、素直に、自然に、あっさりと、巧まずに、平たく、事そのまま、物そのものを写すという傾向である。

Recently, a major revolution has occurred in our literary style or, more generally, in the whole realm of arts. It is nothing but the trend to reproduce things the way they are, plainly and without affectation, simply, naturally and frankly, refraining from those affected, obstinate, twisted, fabricated embellishments that accompanied the old style as if they were the very prerequisite of writing.²²

Haga Yaichi (芳賀矢一, 1867-1927)'s *Sakubun kôwa oyobi bunpan* (Lectures on Composition), published only a few years later, was also written in *genbun itchi* style:

さて又以上に説いた文章体と並んで口語体（言文一致体）という一体がある。この体の文章は明治二十一年頃山田美妙斎の公にしたのが始めてであるが、爾来小説家の間に試みられて漸々に発達し、追々一般の論文や著述にも用いられ、新聞紙の雑報にも採用さるるに至った。今日では小説はことごとく口語文となり、論文も著訳も新聞紙の雑報も停車場の掲示板も小学校の読本も大半は口語文で綴られている。

Standing side by side with the classical style I have just explained, is the modern style (*genbun itchi*). This style was first used by Yamada Bimyô in the 21st year of the Meiji era, and since then it has been tested by novelists and has gradually come to be used in essays, books and even in the miscellaneous sections of newspapers. Today, novels are entirely written in

²² Igarashi, 1.

the modern style, and so are the majority of essays, translations, the miscellaneous sections of newspapers, bulletin boards at the station, and textbooks in elementary schools.²³

Rhetoric's metalanguage was thus consistent with its discourse: rich in classical traits in the works that supported classical prose styles, but replete with contemporary linguistic features in the works that favored a more simplified, realistic written language.

From this investigation it has then become clear that rhetoric was deeply engaged in the debate over the creation of a modern literary language. Rhetoric's contribution to the debate took place by means of a metalinguistic discourse that addressed the question of language on at least two levels, as treatises that explicitly supported a certain written style over others, and as texts that implicitly reiterated that support through the employment of specific stylistic traits. Undoubtedly, rhetoric's metalinguistic discourse was affected by the intellectual climate of the period, which thus shaped the content and form of its discourse. But at the same time it is reasonable to think that the very opposite might also be true. That is to say, rhetoric's discourse may have added significantly to the arguments that each faction made in favor of one style over others.

One further important consideration remains. Rhetoric's own metalanguage may indeed have been the primary cause for its long disregard by scholars of Japanese language and literature. While the rise of Realism and Naturalism have often been considered as the culprits responsible for rhetoric's marginalization in the debate over the question of language, this study has shown that rhetoric's own metalinguistic features during most of the Meiji period may in fact have been the chief cause for its characterization as an old field of study that opposed a written language based on the vernacular.

²³ Haga, 56.

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