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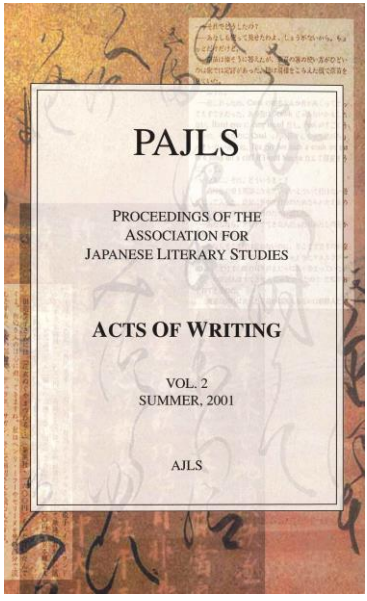

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WRESTING NATIONAL LANGUAGE FROM THE STATE: INOUE HISASHI'S ATTEMPT TO OVERCOME THE MODERN

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Like a number of modern, twentieth century Japanese writers, Inoue Hisashi suffers from a conflicted sense of identity. He can clearly point to a *furusato* (hometown): the small village of Komatsu in the southern part of Yamagata Prefecture (now consolidated into the town of Kawanishi). Yet when he and his mother and two brothers left the village after the Pacific War, his mother burned any remaining bridges with her late husband's family and community. Bitter over her perceived treatment as an outsider after the death of her husband, she reportedly announced to all that would listen,

> I am going to save my money, and someday I will definitely come back. But I won't be coming back here to live. I'm going to hire a plane and fill it full of human shit. I'll return from the sky and I'm going to spread that shit all over this town.[1]

Inoue's mother was a communist who sold goods on the black market and started her own menstrual pad business. Inoue Hisashi was sent to live in an orphanage in Sendai and yet he was not an orphan. He was baptized as a Catholic, but never practiced. While studying French Literature at Sophia University (Jôchi Daigaku) in Tokyo he worked in a strip show in Asakusa. Growing up during a time of tremendous economic, political and ideological upheaval, all of these experiences seem to underscore Inoue's sense of displacement and duality. Beyond the unfortunate circumstances of his life before, during and after the Pacific War, the source of Inoue's feelings of insecurity and inferiority was his sense of alienation from national language (standard Japanese)

[1] Inoue, "Hahagimi no nokoshi tamaishi kotoba," 220.

and by extension, national culture at large. Inoue describes this psychological state in the following way:

> When I was living in the southern part of Yamagata we always had the local dialect, the native language. This language, the one that we used with adults—especially our parents, grandfather and grandmother, and friends—was a forbidden and dirty language. Then there was the real Japanese, the language used in the classroom. We always felt that there was a gap between us and the country of Japan, one that was created by the language that we used. To overcome this gap, we thought that we should go to school and become members of the youth air corps so that we could offer our lives to the country of Japan. We thought this was the only way to get over the rift... When a newspaper was delivered, it was in standard Japanese, standard Japanese in books, and standard Japanese in the classroom. Since our language was different and our everyday lives were detached from these things, we were constantly forced into an awareness of duality.[2]

Although Inoue often blurs the lines between historical fact and imaginative fiction, his account seems plausible in describing the sense of shame associated with speaking the denigrated language of a marginal sub-culture. After the establishment of a universal, compulsory educational system in 1872, regional dialects soon became targeted for eradication by scholars and officials in the Ministry of Education. Ironically, one the chief advocates of the abolition of dialects was a linguistics scholar from Yamagata Prefecture, Hoshina Kôichi (1872-1955). From a strictly academic perspective, Hoshina asserted that regional dialects were not innately inferior in terms of their structure and "in regard to form and quality, not at all different from the standard language."[3] Nonetheless, Hoshina wrote, "when regional dialects are

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[2] In Kuritsubo, 133.

[3] Hoshina 1911, 667. Cited in Lee, 223.

compared with the ordinary language, the range of intellectual exchange is a great deal narrower." He added that:

> The duty of the language is to expand the realm of communication. Regional dialects inherently run counter to this duty because they constrict the zone of interchange. Although there is absolutely no reason to look down upon regional dialects, since they reduce the range of communication, they will naturally become displaced. Moreover, they are something that should be eliminated.[4]

When Hoshina refers to "ordinary language," he refers to the language spoken in the metropolis of Tokyo, and when he asserts that the "range of intellectual exchange is a great deal narrower," he is really pointing to a de-facto discrepancy in education levels between the rural and urban areas. This urban bias was first articulated by Hoshina's mentor in linguistics, Ueda Kazutoshi (1867-1937), the leading proponent of the Japanese national language movement. Ueda defined this new standard language (*hyôjungo*) as "the language of the great imperial metropolis...the spoken language of educated Tokyoites." This was to form the foundation of a standard language to which would be added an "artificial polish."[5] Ueda's criteria are typical of an evolving nationalist discourse that strives to accelerate and streamline the flow of communication from the ideological center of the nation to the periphery. By associating the new standard language with the imperial institution, Ueda implicitly places it under the auspices of "high culture." Ernest Gellner describes the way that high culture is used as a kind of Trojan horse to impose the political will of central authority on the heterogeneous cultural groups at the periphery:

> The basic deception and self-deception practiced by nationalism is this: nationalism is, essentially, the general imposition of a

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[4] Hoshina 1900, 162-63, cited in Lee, *op. cit.*

[5] From a lecture entitled, "Hyôjungo ni tsuite," delivered in 1895. Yoshida and Inoguchi, eds., 502-08. Cited in Lee, 222.

> high culture on society, where previously low cultures had taken up the lives of the majority, and in some cases of the totality, of the population.[6]

While the role of print culture and the *genbun itchi* movement are rightly considered central to the evolution of a standardized form of spoken and written Japanese, spoken forms of Tokyo dialect—the basis for standard Japanese—are often viewed as class-neutral. The *Kôjien* Japanese Dictionary places the origins of standard Japanese in the spoken dialect of the Tokyo middle class. One might argue, however, how could a middle class exist without a national language? Isn't national language an integral part of the development of the middle class itself? As one scholar points out, the words for "mother" and "father" in standard Japanese are only recent inventions of the Ministry of Education during the Meiji Period.[7]

One way to discern the hidden, class-based genealogy of standard Japanese is to consider its antithetical relationship to dialect, and specifically, to Tôhoku dialect, or *zûzûben*. *Zûzûben* describes onomatopoeically the erroneous general perception that Tôhoku dialect is an incomprehensible, muddled mass of inarticulate utterances sounding like "*zûzû*." The term points to the historical marginality of Tôhoku—the last stronghold of the aboriginal Emishi in the Heian Period—and it stands as the ideological antipode of standard Japanese in the modern period. If standard Japanese is to be universally understood by everyone within the boundaries of the nation, *zûzûben* stands as an anachronistic hindrance to progress at the outermost edge of the nation. *Zûzûben* is, in fact, a false signifier that erases the vast internal differences between regional dialects within the Tôhoku region until they are reduced to a state of absolute incomprehensibility: the antithesis of national language.

Much of Inoue Hisashi's writing is aimed at debunking the genealogy of Japanese national language as something that evolved following an inexorable cultural logic over the course of many generations. Inoue wants to recall the rich diversity of the language

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[6] Gellner 1983, 57.

[7] Sawada, 221-22.

before the Meiji Restoration and show how the current homogeneity of standard language represents a constriction of the range of human expression. From Inoue's perspective, not only does standard Japanese artificially limit the range of expression when contrasted with the language of the local community, but standard Japanese's concomitant ideology of homogeneity encourages a general tendency for uncritical affirmation in the communicative exchange process. In Inoue's play, *Kokugo jiken satsujin jiten* (*The National Language Incident and the Killer Dictionary*), a pawnbroker who is attempting to purchase the rights to the word "no" (*iie*), describes the affirmative nature of Japanese language in the following way:

> The language of humans affirms reality and begins with the word, "yes." The Japanese language is particularly affirmative, in other words, nothing but, "yes," you see? "There is a god living in this mountain." "Yes." "There is a god in this river." "Yes." "There is also a god living in this tree." "Yes." "Even that fox is a god." "Yes." So, because no one says, "no," the number just keeps growing to this eight million or so gods.[8]

Inoue seems particularly wary of the power of national language to cloak itself in the guise of tradition and invoke affirmative response reflexively. In many of his plays and novels, Inoue employs various heterogeneous forms of language, including dialect, to counter this trend toward linguistic agreement and acquiescence. In discussing his use of an obscure dialect from southern Yamagata in the play, *Ame*, set during the Edo Period, Inoue provides this rationale:

> I wanted to see if a person's spirit would be crushed if, one day, he were suddenly thrown into the middle of a different linguistic system. I wanted to try using dialect as a means of driving this person into a corner. I abused dialect to this end; my choice had nothing at all to do with dialect's "benign nature," "power,"

[8] Inoue, *Kokugo jiken satsujin jiten*, 116.

"simple beauty," the "Discover Japan-like antiquity" of its words, nor even its "air of mystery," or "friendliness."[9]

Inoue seems to target the modern Japanese who view Japanese culture as a monolithic linguistic universe. Inoue draws specific parallels between his own difficulties in learning English and the way that it was taught as "English for Japanese," not English as an independent communicative medium. In Inoue's earliest plays, including *Nihonjin no heso* (*The Center of the Japanese*, first performed in 1969), he presents national language as a "dead" language. The scholar, Tanaka Yurika, describes Inoue's representation of "Tokyo language" as "a code that cannot convey emotions."[10] In *Nihonjin no heso*, the protagonist, Helen Tenshin, speaks the dialect of Tôno in Iwate Prefecture. As the source of Yanagita Kunio's so-called folklore collection, *Tôno monogatari* (1910), Inoue wisely makes this his extra-peripheral center of regional culture. The story of Helen's life is reenacted by players who attempt to overcome their stuttering conditions through the therapeutic process of acting. Ironically, Helen's character is played by Professor Wataya, a professor of linguistics from Tokyo University, his character representing the apex of male social authority. Speaking in the local dialect, in the first scene, Helen's father warns her about Tokyo before she is about to depart: "Those Tokyo folks are wicked. Men and women speak standard Japanese, they wear neckties and stockings and they won't listen to a country hick."[11] When Helen's train arrives at Ueno Station, the first character to appear is the so-called "right-winger" dressed in the guise of the owner of a dry-cleaning shop. Upon seeing Helen, his first words are: "Th-th-th-that g-g-g-girl...is the one I've been searching for. She's exactly like the picture that was sent to me."[12] In this way, the heterogeneous language and culture of Helen—the quintessential Tôhoku

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[9] Inoue, "Naze hôgen de nakereba naranai no ka," 5.

[10] Tanaka, 234.

[11] Inoue, *Nihonjin no heso*, 118.

[12] *Ibid.*, 120.

figure—is normalized while the culture of the center is presented as disturbed and in need of correction.

As Inoue's depiction of Helen Tenshin as a stripper demonstrates, assimilation into the cultural center entails entering the marketplace, a process in which individuals from the periphery relinquish their bodies, their language and culture. This process of the commodification of regional language and culture is symbolically represented in numerous Inoue works. One overt critique of this phenomenon can be found in *Kokugo gannen* (*Year One of National Language*, first performed in 1986). In this play—a play that Inoue said has languages as the leading cast of characters—the effort to construct a national language is acted out on the stage. The setting is the Meiji period, several years after the Education Act of 1872. The main character, Nangô Seinosuke, has been ordered by the Vice-Minister of Education, Tanaka Fujimaro (1845-1909), to begin investigating the feasibility of "unifying national spoken language." Nangô is a fictional character probably based loosely on the historical figure, Izawa Shûji (1851-1917), a music educator during the Meiji and Taisho periods who wrote theoretical works on the topics of "correcting" Tôhoku dialect pronunciation and methods for curing the speech impediment of stuttering. Nangô lives in Tokyo with his wife, father-in-law, and a number of servants who come from various regions of Japan. Each speaks a different dialect including Aizu dialect (Fukushima), Kyoto dialect, Ushû Yonezawa dialect (Yamagata), Nagoya dialect, Nanbu Tôno dialect (Iwate), both Edo Shitamachi and Edo Yamanote dialects, and Kawachi dialect (Osaka). Chiyo, the prostitute from Osaka, speaks not only the Kawachi dialect, but she also speaks a strictly commercial dialect: *kuruwa kotoba*, the language of the prostitute quarters.

The geopolitical distribution of power is represented by the fact that Nangô is from Chôshû (Yamaguchi) and his wife and father-in-law are from Satsuma (Kagoshima). Since samurai leaders from Satsuma and Chôshû held the highest degree of power in the Meiji pro-imperial oligarchy, the subservient role of the characters from other regions mirrors their positions within the political hierarchy. It is not surprising that two of the three characters from Tôhoku—Tsukidate from Tôno, and Wakabayashi Torazaburô from Aizu—are both the most lowly (the former is a cart-puller) and disreputable (the latter is a boisterous thief).

The chaos that ensues in this hilarious situation reminds the viewer of the absence of a viable common spoken language, especially among the lower classes. Inoue presents a situation in which the course of history can flow in any number of different directions. Initially, Nangô views the speakers of less desirable dialects like *zûzûben* as suffering from a language affliction (*kotoba no yamai*). Like Izawa Shûji, Nangô attempts to approach the problem from a scientific perspective, but it is doomed to fail. Nangô tries various methods to develop a national language, including the arbitrary "eeny meeny miney mo" approach as well as using the standard of political correctness in eliminating the undesirable dialects. Desperate to make progress with his task, Nangô finally resorts to offering to pay each servant to coin new words to replace old ones in their native cultures. He announces, "The reward is 10 *zeni*. I think that we need to get rid of all of the language from the rebel areas. In other words, let's take all of the language from the rebel areas and call the words by new names."[13] This scene seems to underscore the idea that folk culture can be easily commodified for mass consumption, provided it is presented in a generic, artificial form. As Ernest Gellner has discussed in relation to nationalism and the process of modernization, "the self-image of nationalism involves the stress of folk, folklore, popular culture, etc. In fact, nationalism becomes important precisely when these things become artificial."[14] The character who represents the "rebel" culture, Torazaburô from Aizu, firmly rejects Nangô's proposal and complains that this constitutes cultural treachery:

> Listen, language is something that you have when you are alive. It's a treasure that you can't be without. Without words, even an academic who splits hairs doesn't know what's going on. Words are what strike deals and sell things. You need words when you love someone, when you make friends, when you cheer someone up and when someone cheers you up. People can't live without words. Do you think it's fine for someone to sell off these precious words just because they feel like it? I've

[13] Inoue, *Kokugo gannen*, 345-46.

[14] Gellner 1994, 58.

> never heard of such a stupid thing! ...This is just like selling off your parents and siblings![15]

Torazaburô's rhetoric is echoed in words of the scholar of national language, Yûichi Komatsu, in Inoue's novel, *Kirikirijin* (*The Kirikirians*, 1982). Komatsu articulates more clearly the fundamental conflict between national language, the language of central authority, and dialect or common language, the language of the local community.

> We refuse to take any more orders made in the language of Tokyo. We think of things in our own language; we work, we want to go on living in this language. As long as we are living as common farmers (*hyakushô*) on this land, Kirikiri language is our skin, our flesh, our blood, our bones; it is our very selves! When we begin to consider things in our own language, we crash head-on with the dictates of the center. Until now, we had to tearfully switch back and forth from standard language to common language (*kyôtsûgo*) in our heads. But this will now just be a part of history.[16]

Komatsu, whose name is read in reverse order like Helen Tenshin in *Nihonjin no heso*, is a parody of the Meiji national language scholar mentioned earlier, Ueda Kazutoshi. The fictional Tôhoku village of Kirikiri and its bid for independent nationhood from Japan is a topsy-turvy parody of the construction of the Meiji nation-state. Komatsu's description of Kirikiri's national language (a very specific dialect from northern Miyagi Prefecture) links it directly with the bodies and identities of the Kirikiri people, an obvious echo of the mystical enunciation of the Japanese body-politic or *kokutai*. Inoue's novel is a terrorist attack on the post-Meiji national narrative in which the periphery becomes a new, rival center and Japanese become foreigners, or in Kirikiri national language: *geegokuzun*. Inoue's satire takes aim at not only the modern

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[15] Inoue, *Kokugo gannen*, 351-52.

[16] Inoue, *Kirikirijin*, vol. 1, 105-06.

myth of Japanese homogeneity, but also the hidden elite biases imbedded in Japanese national language.

Like *Kokugo gannen, Kirikirijin* is a bivalent text in which the main text is represented in standard Japanese in the form of Chinese characters while unorthodox readings of the characters are provided in the phonetic syllabary. When these characters are given a northern Tôhoku dialect reading, as they are in *Kirikirijin*, the stable authority of standard Japanese words, augmented by the gravitas of the Chinese characters, is immediately undermined by the vulgar associations generated by *zûzûben*. The hauteur and elite structures of reference hidden in Japanese national language begin to emerge in relief when Komatsu, the Kirikiri scholar of Kirikiri national language, translates literary works from the Japanese canon into Kirikiri language. The effect is most pronounced when the protagonist of the novel, Furuhashi Kenji, reads Komatsu's translation of Kawabata Yasunari's *Yukiguni* (*Snow Country*). The original detached tone of cold aestheticism becomes replaced by the earthy, convivial voice of the local raconteur sharing a story with neighbors around the sunken hearth: "When we popped out of that long tunnel, there it was: the Snow Country" (*Kokkyô no nangee tonneru ba noketto Yukiguni dattacha*).[17] Komatsu not only vulgarizes the Japanese literary canon through his Kirikiri translations of the famous works like Natsume Sôseki's *Botchan*, Dazai Osamu's *Shayô* (*The Setting Sun*), and Kobayashi Hideo's essay on Mozart, his translation of Uno Kôchiro's *Meibamen-shû* (*A Collection of Famous Scenes*) reveals the reader's unconscious association between earthy eroticism and Tôhoku language and culture. Komatsu's translation of one of the pornographic scenes from Uno's collection is surprisingly effective in the Kirikiri idiom. Unlike Kawabata's text, Uno's narrative is largely dialogic and more concrete in its description, thus creating the powerful illusion of being unmediated. When, in the height of passion, the male protagonist exclaims "*eegoto eegoto*" ("that feels good, that feels good") in Kirikiri language, there is little incongruity between the language and the actions being described. Here Inoue demonstrates how the reader unconsciously links the rural dialect with vulgar modes of expression, yet

[17] *Ibid.*, 189.

deems any association with intellectual depth or aesthetic sublimity as inappropriate.

Inoue's critique of standard Japanese seems focused on two fundamentally related issues. The first problem concerns the hidden class consciousness embedded in standard Japanese. These structures of attitude and reference correspond to the erasure of cultural and linguistic heterogeneity with the rise of the Meiji nation-state. The second issue relates to the privileging of written forms over spoken ones in standard Japanese. This, I believe Inoue would argue, is a disruption of the natural primacy of the spoken indigenous Japanese words (*Yamato kotoba*) over Chinese vocabulary and foreign loan words. In discussing the immutable aspects of Japanese language in general, Inoue argues that *Yamato kotoba* and Japanese grammar operate at the deepest linguistic level. In his view, Chinese linguistic elements form a secondary stratum while European loan words constitute the outer, tertiary level.[18] Although the relationship between dialect and standard Japanese appears antagonistic in Inoue's writings, this seems to be his attempt to reconfigure the genealogy of modern Japanese language by revealing the inverted historical narrative. This process can ostensibly reinvigorate the written language with heterogeneous spoken elements and reconnect the rich diversity of the regional language with the ideologically constrained language of the political center. Although this can be interpreted as a conservative, preservationist agenda, it also reflects Inoue's fundamental opposition to the post-Meiji ideological construction of a homogeneous national consciousness.

[18] Inoue, "Nihongo wa mada hatten tojô," 21.

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