Conspicuous Absence: 'National Language' in Japanese History Textbooks

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Abstract

In spite of great diversity within the dialect continuum, stretching from Kagoshima to Aomori, consistent state-endorsed language policies since the later Meiji Period were highly successful in achieving, in the first half of the twentieth century, a high degree of homogeneity regarding ethnic and linguistic identity, contributing to the establishment of a stable modern nation-state in Japan. The present study deals with the conspicuous absence of appropriate treatment of the role these policies played in high school history textbooks.

Keywords: Japanese, national language, kokugo, language policy, history textbooks

要旨

日本の方言は、鹿児島県から青森県にまで及ぶ連続体であり、その中身はきわ めて多様である。それにも関わらず、明治後期から国家によって進められた言 語政策の結果、日本では20世紀前半までに国内の民族的・言語的アイデンテ ィティが高度に均質化し、近代的国民国家を確立させた。本研究では高等学校 の歴史教科書に焦点を当て、これらの言語政策に対する記述が極めて限られた 形でしか行われていない問題を取り扱う。

キーワード:日本語、国語、言語政策、歴史教科書

1. Introduction

The natural state of languages is variation, as is witnessed by the hundreds if not thousands of languages spoken in New Guinea. Existence of homogeneous languages spread over a wide territory is always proof of complex political and historical processes that led to such a situation (cf. Makoni and Pennycock eds. 2007).

Let us take as an example the continuum of South Slavic languages, stretching for about 1,200 km as the crow flies, from the northern tip of the Adriatic Sea to the Bulgarian Black Sea coast, approximately in a west-east direction, occupying an area of about 340,000 sq. km. Through various historical processes this linguistic continuum, after the demise of Yugoslavia, was to be divided into as many as seven different homogeneous standard national languages, i.e. Bulgarian, Macedonian, Montenegrin, Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian, and Slovene, of as many nation states (Figure 1. below¹).

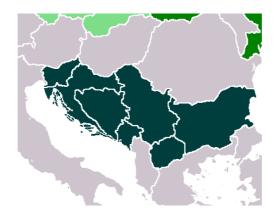


Figure 1: South Slavic languages continuum

Occupying roughly the same area (about 380,000 sq. km) and stretching over an even longer distance, for about 1,400 km as the crow flies if we exclude the Ryukyu archipelago and Hokkaido, from Kyushu in the south-west to the tip of Honshu in the north-east, the manifold Japanese dialects that historically populate the islands are now dialects in a single polity, Japan, with a single national language, Japanese *kokugo* 国語 (Figure 2. below²).



Figure 2: Map of Japan

In the light of the final fragmentation in the case of the South Slavic languages, even if we do not take into account Japan's fragmented 'mediaeval' history with wars, switching allegiances, etc., unification of the area under its rule and the creation of a modern nation state with a single national language permeating every pore of society was no mean feat for the Meiji regime.

Based on the importance of this achievement and the central role *kokugo* played in the consolidation of national identity and national unity in Japan, its treatment in high school history textbooks seems a topic worthy of examination. This study is the first attempt to delve into the issue, and is necessarily incomplete and preliminary³.

2. Textbooks

In the period after WWII, high school textbooks, as all other primary and secondary level textbooks, were subject to government examination carried out by MEXT (an abbreviation for Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology), (Source 1, 2). The approved textbooks, chosen by local self-governing bodies (*jichitai* 自治体), were distributed among the pupils free of charge. The textbooks examined for this study also comply with this scheme.

2.1 High school history textbooks

High school history textbooks are divided into two categories: *Nihonshi B* (Japanese history B 日本史B) with a comprehensive approach to history from the beginnings to modern times; and *Nihonshi A* (Japanese history A 日本史A) dealing with Japan from the Meiji Restoration onward. The most widely used are the *Nihonshi B* type textbooks.

As a preliminary step, several *Nihonshi B* (Japanese history B) textbooks, by publishers such as Sanseido and Yamakawa, were examined.

First, keywords such as *kokugo* (国語 national language), *nihongo* (日本語 Japanese), *genbun itchi* (言文一致 written language style based on modern spoken language or the eponymous movement for the affirmation of this style) and so on, were examined in the indexes of the respective textbooks. Other than the exception of *genbun itchi*, no textbook had any of the above keywords in the index. In the text itself, *Nihonshi B* published by Sanseido, seems to have by far the most references related to national language in the various historical and social contexts from among all the textbooks that were examined. Nonetheless, even in this textbook the references were short and often included other information, not directly relevant to the issues of language, in the same sentence.

2.2 High school kokugo (national language) textbooks

In addition to history textbooks, high school textbooks dealing with *kokugo*, actually readers, compilations of literary texts, essays, etc. with commentaries, such as *kokugo sogo* (国語総合 general Japanese), and *gendai bun* (現代文 modern writing), by publishers such as Chikuma Shobo, Tokyo Shoseki, etc., were examined. The concept of these textbooks is to convey to learners the potential richness of variation of expression that is inherent in the Japanese language, presented as *kokugo*. In the case of *gendai bun* textbooks, the topics treated are limited to modern texts. In the case of *kokugo sogo* textbooks, the whole span from modern to classical texts, including *kanbun* 漢文, classical Chinese texts read-on-the-fly in a Japanese way (i.e. the so called *kanbun kundoku* 漢文訓読), is covered. These textbooks are intellectually and aesthetically appealing and typographically well executed. The basic orientation of these textbooks also has the potential to include relevant information on the historical, social and political context of the development and role of the unified (and unifying) national language from the Meiji period on. In spite of this potential, no such attempt was observed in any of the books examined.

Since for one of the textbooks the general supervisor of the edition was Kato Shuichi, one of the most prominent liberal Japanese intellectuals of the post-war period, it can also be surmised that such omissions were not directly related to authors' and compilers' ideological biases such as conservative vs. progressive, traditionalist vs. modern, etc., neither were they influenced by the process of textbook approval.

3. Analysis

In this section, the textbook that relates most extensively to the national language issue, *Nihonshi B* (Japanese history B) by Aoki Michio et al. (2009) published by Sanseido, will be examined in more detail.

The Contents at the beginning of the textbook (pp. iv, v) display chapters such as Chapter 15. 'The Meiji Restoration and the Modern State' (*Meiji ishin to kindai kokka* 明治維新と近代国家), prime candidates for the description of the language issue (the so called *kokugo mondai* 国語問題) in Japan. Yet section titles and subheadings do not hint at anything related to language policies at the time. A similar situation can be seen in the index at the end of the textbook. The only explicit reference is to *genbun itchi* (written style based on contemporary spoken language). There are no direct references to *kokugo* (national language) or to *nihongo* (Japanese).

In the main text though, there are several references to national language and various language policies. I will examine these in the rest of this section.

At the end of Chapter 15, in Section 5. 'Equality of the Four Classes of People and Opening towards Civilisation' (i.e. westernization) (*shimin byodo to bunmei kaika* 市 民平等と文明開化), there is, under the subheading 'The Spread of Enlightened Thought and Development in the Sphere of Religion' (*Keimo shiso no fukyu to shukyo no ugoki* 啓蒙思想の普及と宗教の動き), on p.244, a short mention of *nihongo* (Japanese) in the context of the publication of newspapers while still under *bakufu* rule:

After the opening of ports, there were newspapers published in the foreigners' permitted residence areas [such as] Yokohama, Kobe (Hyogo), etc., and after 1851 (Kaei 4) when Motoki Shozo (本木昌造) succeeded in casting lead printing type, newspapers as well as journals and books in Japanese, printed in moving type, began to be published.

開港後、横浜・神戸(兵庫)・長崎などの外国人居留地で新聞が出されていた が、1851(嘉永4)年に本木昌造が鉛活字の鋳造に成功して以後、活版印刷 による日本語の新聞や雑誌・書籍などが発行されるようになった。

The text says that besides foreign newspapers that were beginning to be published in the late Edo period, newspapers in Japanese were also published after the moving type for Japanese characters had been invented. It is interesting to note that in the *kokugo* type of textbook, reference to such cases would probably be the much more ideologically loaded *kokugo* (actually Japanese viewed as the national language) and not the neutral *nihongo* (Japanese).

The next mention of *nihongo* is in Chapter 16. 'Formation of the Constitutional System of Meiji' (明治憲法体制の成立), in Section 5. 'Promulgation of the Imperial Constitution' (大日本帝国憲法の制定) under the heading 'Establishing Regional Self-rule' (地方自治制度の整備) on p. 259 in the context of policies in the newly officially incorporated territories of Hokkaido and the Ryukyus:

In Hokkaido the [Hokkaido] development agency kaitakushi 開拓使 was abolished and in 1886 the Hokkaido Administration Hokkaido cho 北海道庁 was established. Vast land and state-owned factories, etc. were sold to nobility (kazoku 華族) and businesses with close links to government (seisho 政商), with prisoners being mobilized for the construction of roads and opening of mines. In addition there was development of virgin lands by colonists, and the Ainu, being robbed of a place where they could live, were, under the Hokkaido Former Aboriginal People Protection Law Hokkaido kyu dojin ho 北海道旧土人法 which was promulgated in 1899 ostensibly to protect them and encourage them to work in agriculture, expulsed to 'protected areas' hogo chi 保護地 where they were subject to assimilation policies such as being compelled to learn Japanese and forced to change their names to Japanese ones <4>. In Okinawa there was persistent resentment against the Ryukyu solution (Ryukyu shobun 琉球処分). The Prefectural Office, trying to proceed smoothly with prefectural politics, appeased [the powers to be] by choosing the policy of preservation of the original landowning system. But on Miyako and Yaeyama islands there was resistance against the uniform head tax introduced since they were under rule by the Satuma han and against the government selling off communal land and fishing grounds (*iriaichi* λ 会地) cheaply to powerful nobility and merchants ...

北海道では、1882年に開拓使が廃止きれ、1886年に北海道庁がもうげられ、 広大な土地や官営工場などの華族や政商への払い下げや囚人を動員しての道 路建設や鉱山開発がすすめられた。入植者による開墾もくわわり、生活の場 を奪われていたアイヌは、1899年に農業の奨励と保護を名目にした北海道旧 土人法が公布されると、保護地に追いやられ、日本語や日本式の名前への変 更などを強制される同化政策を強いられた<4>。沖縄では琉球処分に対する不 満が根強かった。県庁は県政を円滑に行うために、これまでの土地制度を温 存する政策をとって懐柔につとめた。しかし薩摩藩以来の人頭税が継続され た宮古・八重山群島での農民による反対運動や、有力士族や商人への入会地 払い下げ反対運動などがおこった(・・・)

In the passage above, in one long sentence, colonial policy in Hokkaido towards the indigenous Ainu people, including the promulgation of the Hokkaido Former Aboriginal People Protection Law and as one of its prominent consequences, the forced removal of Ainu to 'protected territories' and the forced imposition on them of Japanese

language (*nihongo*) and of Japanese names (*nihonshiki no namae*), is mentioned. The text continues with related policies in Okinawa but it does not mention the language issue at all, even though it was Ryukyuan, a language related to Japanese but differing to the extent that they were mutually unintelligible, that was the language of the Ryukyu kingdom before the incorporation of Ryukyu into Japan as Okinawa.

From this difference in treatment of Hokkaido and Okinawa it can be surmised that for the authors language policies towards the newly acquired minorities were just a marginal issue in the historical context.

The next mention of *nihongo* is Chapter 17. 'Industrial Revolution and the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese Wars' (*Sangyo kakumei to Nisshin-Nichiro senso* 産業革命と日清・日露戦争). On p. 263, in Section 1. 'Sino-Japanese War' (*nisshin senso*日清戦争) under the heading 'Taiwan and Korea after the Sino-Japanese War' (日 清戦争後の台湾と朝鮮) cited below, Japanese language is mentioned in the context of Japanese policies in Taiwan which was ceded to Japan after the Sino-Japanese war:

In 1895, in Taiwan, which had become a Japanese territory, there was a strong resistance movement by the islanders. Japan sent the army to suppress it. Further, the Taiwan Governor Office (*Taiwan sotokufu* 総督府) was established with a former marine soldier being sent in as the first governor. **Taiwan islanders were forced to become subjects of Imperial Japan through assimilatory policies such as being forced to learn Japanese**. In addition, a registry of landownership together with a tax system were drawn up, and the construction of roads, railways and ports was undertaken. In 1897 the Bank of Taiwan (*Taiwan ginko 台湾銀行*) was established and the ground was laid for Japanese companies to advance into Taiwan.

日本の領土となった台湾では、1895年、島民によるはげしい抵抗運動がおこった。日本は軍隊を派遣して制圧にあたらせた。そして台湾に台湾総督府を 設置して初代総督に海軍軍人を任命し、台湾島民に日本語 (→p.279)を強制 するなど大日本帝国の一員になることを求める同化政策を進めた。さらに土 地の所有者の確定と租税制度、道路・鉄道・港湾などを整備し、1897年に紙 幣発行銀行として台湾銀行を設立して、日本の企業が台湾に進出しやすい基 盤きずいていった。

Here, even though it is short, we have a straightforward description of Japan's language policy orientation in Taiwan. It is interesting to note that later on too, in the context of colonial rule of Korea, policies such as the forced introduction of Japanese as the only language in public and education or the forced change of name (*soshikaimei* 創氏改名) are also mentioned.

The longest passage related to *kokugo*, language policies and education is also in Chapter 17, Section 5. 'Culture in the Meiji Period' (*Meiji no bunka* 明治の文化), pp. 279-80:

Since 1886 elementary school textbooks were subject to government approval (*kenteisei* 検定制) and from 1903 on they became government designated (*kokuteisei* 国定制). As for the subjects taught, Japanese grammar was being developed, national language (*kokugo* 国語) was established and the teaching of standard language (*hyojungo* 標準語) began both in Japan proper and in Taiwan, which had became a Japanese colony, and also [songs such as] *Chocho* (Butterfly) and *Hotaru no hikari* ('The Light of Fireflies', actually a remake of *Auld Lang Syne*), based on western musical scales, were sung in chorus. In 1907 compulsory education was extended from four to six years and the rate of attendance in elementary school, which was 50% in the middle of the Meiji period, increased to 95%.

小学校の教科書<2>は1886年から検定制に、1903年からは国定制になった。 学科では、日本語の文法づくりがすすみ、国語科がもうけられて標準語の指 導が日本国内や植民地となった台湾ではじまり、また、西洋音階による『蝶々』 や『蛍の光』などが唱歌<3>となった。1907年、義務教育は4年から欧米並み の6年に延長され、小学校の就学率も明治なかばの50%前後から日露戦争後 には95%へと上昇した。

In this passage, important developments such as progress on the codification of Japanese grammar, the introduction of *kokugo* as a subject in school textbooks and the teaching of standard Japanese (*hyojungo*) within Japan proper (this seems to include, according to the authors, the so called *gaichi* external territories such as Okinawa and Hokkaido) as well as in the only colony at that time, Taiwan, is mentioned. While this is the most exhaustive mention in any of the textbooks that were examined, even here it seems that the intent was not so much to explain the serious developments in language related issues as to stress the steps made towards modernization. This observation is based on the fact that the passage devoted to language policy developments is expressed in the same sentence as the reference to the introduction of Western musical scales and Western singing into the curriculum.

Under the next heading 'Formation of Modern Literature' (*Kindai bungaku no seiritsu* 近代文学の成立), immediately after on p. 280, new developments on the literary scene based on contemporary spoken language and the *genbun itchi* movement are introduced.

Even after Meiji, works by light fiction (*gesaku* 獻作) authors such as Kanagaki Robun (仮名垣魯文 1829-1894), for example *Aguranabe* 安愚楽鍋, were popular, and people continued to enjoy *yomihon* (読本 romantic narratives) and *ninjobon* (人 情本 decadent love stories); fiction genres, translations of European literature such

as 'Around the World in Eighty Days' (Le tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours 八 十日間世界一周 by Jules Verne), and translations of political novels by members of the civil rights movement minken undoka 民権運動家 were also popular.

In 1885 Tsubouchi Shoyo 坪内逍遙 criticized light fiction and political novels and in his work 'The Essence of a Novel' (*Shosetsu shinzui* 小説神髄) stressed the importance for novels to be realistic, that is to faithfully depict human psychology and mores. Subsequently, in 1882, Futabatei Shimei 二葉亭四迷 criticized Tsubouchi, stressing that what was important was realism based in ideology and wrote the novel *Ukigumo* (Floating clouds, 浮雲) written in a simple colloquial style, thus establishing the base of the modern novel. Moreover, at about the same time, Yamada Bimyo 山田美妙 began the genbun itchi 言文一 致 (convergence of spoken and written language) movement to make the written style closer to colloquial language, and in 1885, together with Ozaki Koyo 尾崎紅葉, he established *Kenyusha* (硯友社, company of ink stone friends), and in 1888 the first dilettanti litterary magazine *Garakuta bunko* 我樂 多文庫 was established.

明治時代に入っても、戯作者の仮名垣魯文(1829-94)の『安愚楽鍋』が人気をえ るなど、いぜん読本や人情本(p.211)が人びとに親しまれていたが、『八十日間 世界一周』などの欧米文学の翻訳や、民権運動家による政治小説が生まれた。 1885年に坪内逍遙は、戯作や政治小説を批判して、『小説神髄』をあらわ し、人間心理や風俗などを忠実にあらわす写実の重要性を訴えた。さらに、 1887 年、二葉亭四迷は坪内を批判し、思想性をもっ写実主義こそ重要だと主 張し、平易な口語で『浮雲』をあらわし、近代小説の基礎をきずいた。また このころ、山田美妙は、書きことばを話しことばに近い文章であらわす言文 一致運動をはじめ、1885年に尾崎紅葉とともに硯友社を結成し、1888年には 初の同人雑誌である『我楽多文庫』を創刊した。

In the cited segment, in the context of more traditional developments, efforts at modernization in literature through translation of representative works of Western literature (at the time Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days* was considered as such) is introduced. The *genbun itchi* movement is introduced more as one of the articles on the list of important Meiji cultural events. Its relation to the pioneering work of Futabatei Shimei is not obvious at all in this context. Such treatment of language policy developments points to the conclusion that, in this context, the authors had no serious intent to show the importance of the chosen language policies of Meiji Japan for the modernization project per se, but, on the other hand, used the facts as an illustration of the various modernizing efforts undertaken at the time.

Colonial language policies in Korea are mentioned in Chapter 21. 'Pacific War' (*Taiheiyo senso* 太平洋戦争), Section 1. 'Beginning of Japan-America Hostilities and the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Zone' (*Nichibei kaisen to Daitoa kyoeiken* 日米開 戦と大東亜共栄圏) under the heading 'The Real Face of the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Zone' (*Daitoa kyoeiken no jitsuzo* 大東亜共栄圏の実像), pp. 330-331. On p. 330 we have:

Korea, because of the war, was seen as the base for the provision of necessary materials, and the policies of turning people into Japanese imperial subjects (kominka seisaku 皇民化政策), such as through forced praying at Shinto shrines and forced use of Japanese at schools, were thoroughly implemented. In 1939 the change of [Korean] names into Japanese-style names (soshi kaimei 創 氏改名) was enforced and in 1944 the army draft was introduced, which in 1945 was applied to Taiwan as well. Women were organised into female working groups (teishintai 挺身隊) to work in military industry factories or were sent to the front as 'comfort women' (ianfu 慰安婦) together with young women from the Philippines and elsewhere. Japan repressed people who resisted [such policies], and numerous Koreans and Chinese war prisoners were forced to work in coal mines and elsewhere. The policy of turning people into Japanese imperial subjects was also implemented in Manchuria and [the people there] were mobilized for war purposes or for the exploitation of natural resources <5>.

朝鮮は戦争のための人と物資の供給基地とみなされ、神社参拝や学校での日本語の強制使用など、大日本帝国の臣民として一体化するための皇民化政策が徹底された。1939年には名前を日本風に改めさせる「創氏改名」が強制され、1944年には徴兵制がしかれ、1945年には台湾<4>にも適用された。女性も挺身隊に組織されて軍事工場などで労働に従属させられたり日本軍兵士のための慰安婦としてフィリピンなどの若い女性とともに戦場に送りこまれた。日本は抵抗する人びとを弾圧しながら、多数の朝鮮人と中国人捕虜を炭鉱や鉱山などの労働者として強制連行するとともに、日本で不足する米を朝鮮・台湾から強制約に供出させた。満州でも皇民化政策が推進され、戦争や資源開発のために動員されていった<5>。

Here again language assimilation policies are mentioned but there are no details as to what was actually happening in language. The same is true of the forced change of Korean surnames and forenames into Japanese names. All the events are listed as instances of a wider assimilatory policy. Furthermore, a few lines later, on p. 331, a similar situation in SE Asia is mentioned:

On the other hand, in SE Asia, Japan established puppet regimes under military rule, and as in Korea and Taiwan, forced the praying at Shinto shrines and the spread of Japanese language. Thus, the Japanese army, while taking possession of oil, iron ore, rubber, wood and other strategic materials by force, continued to mobilize the people and forced them to produce rice or other goods.

一方、東南アジアでは、日本は、傀儡政権をつくって軍政をしき、朝鮮や台 湾と同じように神社参拝や日本語の普及などをすすめた。そして日本軍は、 石油や鉄鉱石、ゴム、木材などの戦略物資を強制的にとりあげるとともに、 米などの生産強制や人びとを動員していった。

Here again we have a description of the contemporary situation as a list of policy steps, besides plundering natural and human resources, we also have the forced use of Japanese language and forced obedience to religious rites such as praying at Shinto shrines.

4. Conclusion

Consistent, state-endorsed and often state-enforced language policies since from approximately the second half of the Meiji Period onwards, which though they finally failed in colonial territories were successful in inner provinces (*naichi* 内地) as well as in Hokkkaido and Okinawa, achieved by the first half of the twentieth century a high degree of homogeneity regarding linguistic and ethnic identity in Japan.

As mentioned earlier in Section 3, examination of the material taken from the *Nihonshi B* textbook published by Sanseido, shows some concern with language policy issues during Meiji and pre-war Japan. The passages cited above exhaust the topics covered by the textbooks analyzed for this study. Nonetheless, in spite of the importance of the issue, in the textbooks, this concern does not go beyond introducing such examples as merely illustrations or instances of wider trends.

Such a tendency may seem surprising at a time when the perception of past events, due to distance in time and advances in research, is expected to have become mature. Yet it seems this is not an isolated tendency. The research tradition of *kokugo*, projecting *kokugo* back into history, to the linguistic practices of the premodern inhabitants of Japan, succeeded, it seems, in transforming *kokugo* into an entity existing beyond time, akin to the air people breathe, always there since time immemorial but never questioned in its essence. This view is reflected not only in *kokugo* textbooks which offer no mention of the genesis of Modern Japanese and its importance for the State of Japan, but is also reflected in the parallel development in the sphere of *kokugo* research itself.

The so called *Kokugo shi*, histories of *kokugo*, even those written by respected scholars (cf. Kamei 1965, Watanabe 1999, etc.), skip the socio-political and historical circumstances of the genesis of modern language almost completely. It is only from the late 1980s or early 1990s that a comparatively younger generation of critical *kokugo* scholars, sociologists, literature researchers and historians, such as I Yeonsuk (1996), Osa Shizue (1998), Yasuda Toshiaki (1999), Komori Yoichi (2000) and others, started delving critically and systematically into the ideological, cultural, social, political and historical circumstances of the 'birth and life' of Modern Japanese.

The marginal view of the 'kokugo mondai' (national language problem) that we have seen in the textbook material analyzed, is thus a natural consequence of a certain view of society in general and history in particular, where language is perceived as a context and not as one of the essential factors contributing towards developments in society and at the same time is shaped by those developments. It is hoped that this new perception of the role of language and the advances in the research of Japan's history and society based on this perception, will someday also trickle down to the high school textbook.

This study is just the first step into an enquiry of the treatment of national language and language policy in general in Japanese high school textbooks. The level of analysis is basically descriptive and no attempts have yet been made to put the findings into theoretical perspective. It is hoped that with a wider amount of relevant material examined it will also be possible to tackle the problem from a more theoretically based approach, assuring that a more refined picture of the problem may emerge in the future.

¹ Figure 1 is based on

<upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/80/Slavic_europe.svg>

² Figure 2 is based on

<upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/29/Sea_of_Japan_Map.png>

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