

Racializing the National Language

Ueda Kazutoshi's Kokugo Reform

Having looked extensively at the first two decades of the Meiji period, we now turn to Ueda Kazutoshi and his reforms. I am deeply indebted to the many works on Ueda, but, as I mentioned in the introduction, much previous scholarship has demonized Ueda as the father of linguistic nationalism, and the overemphasis of nationalism and ethnocentrism in such scholarship has swayed many away from the process of racialization that I wish to highlight in this chapter. These works focus on Japan's de-Asianization or de-Sinification project, which are extremely important in thinking about Japanese imperialism in East Asia. But the narrow focus on Japanese ethnocentrism in relation to China, Korea and other colonies has resulted in a concealment of race as a major index of identity by which language was defined. There is, of course, no way to deny that Ueda was a nationalist, as he did define *kokugo* as the “spiritual blood of the Japanese people” (*Nihonjin no seishinteki ketsueki*). But we must remind ourselves that nationalism and racism reinforce one another—not through the relationship of cause and effect, but in the sense that the formation and reification of one in many cases foster the other. Therefore, the premise of this chapter is that racism is critical to the foundation of modernity, and we must be mindful of all its slippages into ethnocentrism and nationalism.

Just as we have seen in the previous chapters, we need to keep in mind that many of the terms that we currently take for granted, such as *jinshu* or *minzoku*, didn't mean then what they mean now. The term *jinshu* (now denoting “race”) was in flux, and its use still very unstable, as we shall see in more detail later. The term *minzoku*, which we now often translate as “ethnic nation” or “ethnicity,” was not yet in wide use.¹ This does not mean that the terms were not used; it simply signifies the chaotic conditions in which what constitutes a “nation” or “national community” was being probed.

Again, racialization must be understood as a form of social categorization based on physical traits, arbitrarily yet decisively chosen to determine one's place in society. Racial categories are fabricated and hierarchized and "whiteness" is construed as an object of desire. We must also remind ourselves that multiple indexes of identity must be constructed and need to work in tandem for a given index of identity to constitute itself. As such, race cannot be divorced from ethnicity or nationality. They are all mutually invasive. Hence it is important to define the varying logics that form or shape the forces of identification. Here I want to focus on the logic of equality and "naturalization," two of the defining characteristics of modernity that reify and foster racism. I would like to do so in light of how Ueda posits the "Japanese language" and show how his reform is complicit with the project of racialization.

In his "Kokugo to kokka to" ("National Language and Nation"), an essay based on a series of talks he gave and published soon after Japan's victory in the First Sino-Japanese war in 1895, Ueda defines the relationship between the nation and its national language in the following manner:

A language, for the people who speak, is the symbol of the spirit of compatriots, just like the blood shared by their bodies. Taking the Japanese national language as an example, the Japanese language is the spiritual blood of the Japanese people. The nation of Japan is maintained by this spiritual blood, and the Japanese race (*Nihon no jinshu*) is unified by this most potent and long-preserved chain. Therefore, when visited by a crisis, as long as this voice resonates, our forty million compatriots will listen to it and come to help one another. . . . On learning of good news of victory, the celebration song for the emperor echoes from Chishima through Okinawa.²

In this infamous passage, Ueda posits a logic of equality among forty million people, a figure which includes those from Chishima (currently the Kuril islands, north of Hokkaidō) to Okinawa. These are boundaries which were still very much contested at that time. On the one hand, as he states elsewhere, this appears "democratic," as he argues against the production of a language that is controlled solely by the upper class or intellectuals. Yet, on the other hand, there is danger in this logic of equality: "equality" provides a grounding for comparing individuals and producing differences. If one speaks a dialect, one is "marked" as a minority. The façade of equality, which can never sustain itself, always produces excess and/or lack. The dominant regulative idea will then be used to explain the excess and/or lack.

Positing *kokugo* as "the spiritual blood of the Japanese people," Ueda also mobilizes the logic of "naturalization." These forty million people "naturally" speak this "Japanese language"—so a given person that belongs to this community necessarily is endowed with certain abilities "naturally." This "Japanese language" binds them together like a chain, and precisely because of this, if a crisis occurs to anyone who belong to this community, the community will offer help to those in need.

As many scholars have remarked, Ueda did not believe in one “race” speaking one language. Despite this, however, he states: “For a nation to be established, we must acknowledge that there must be one race that is the pillar of the nation. In order to realize our movement, we need the *yamato* spirit of loyalty and patriotism and the *yamato minzoku* that possess this nation’s language.”³ Ueda’s ethnocentrism has often been pointed out, but it is worth noting the very common logic of national community at play here, which is complicit with the logic of equality and naturalization that was posited earlier. “Equality” is inextricably linked to the need for assimilation because of the logic of “naturalization.” Equality, which should fundamentally be about “rights,” slips into a *need* to be “equal.” It is not that we are simply “equal,” but that we need to become the “same.” Take one’s language ability, for example. One is naturally endowed with such an ability. However, ultimately, our language ability is an individual ability—one person is better at Japanese than I am or vice versa. But when one’s ability becomes the source of judgment regarding whether one “rightfully” belongs to a given national community, a hierarchy is inevitably instituted among the speakers. The standard by which such judgment is made is by the “imagined majority”—in this case the *yamato minzoku*.

This is also one defining characteristic of a national community: a part of a whole functioning like a synecdoche that defines the nation. In other words, a nation will always have an imagined dominant majority, a part of a whole that sets the standard by which a given nation is defined. This majority is allegedly somewhere—like the *yamato minzoku* in Japan, whites in the United States—but it can only be imagined and thus in need of continuous fabrication. This is precisely why *anyone* can be suddenly marked as a minority in this framework.

Having thus established the powerful majority, Ueda then claims the following in “Kokugo kenkyū ni tsuite” (“On the Study of *Kokugo*”):

We, the members of this research group, are ones who show great respect and love for the *kokugo* of the Great Japanese Empire. We do not fall behind anyone, especially in investigating [language] in our scholarly endeavors, and in pursuit of [*kokugo*’s] expansion. . . . We are the ones who have made a lifelong commitment to creating a common language of Asia (*Tōyō zentai no futsūgo*): a language that anyone involved in scholarship, politics, and business in Asia—whether this person be Korean, Chinese, European, or American—would need to know.⁴

This *Tōyō zentai no futsūgo* was later renamed *Tōa kyōtsūgo* (language common to all of Asia), the education which Ueda and his disciples later tried to implement in Japan’s colonies. Despite his fanatic nationalism, Ueda never conceptualized *kokugo* as a language that belonged only to the Japanese. In fact, he attempted to conceptualize *kokugo* as a language equivalent to French, English, and Spanish, that would be spoken beyond a single nation. In short, he conceptualized Japanese as an imperial language, and thus he conceptualized it as “white.” At the onset of modernity in Meiji Japan, the marker of whiteness consisted in possessing a

nation-state. Nation formation was thus of the utmost necessity. But the unit of the nation was only one form of whiteness. As the desire to be “white” was inevitably frustrated, it needed to further find ways to reinforce its whiteness. In effect, Japan had to possess an empire in which Japan was the center. The Japanese language that Ueda conceptualized was an imperial language which could be spoken by anyone in the Japanese empire. It was thus not simply a national language (to a degree, of course, it is, as the *yamato minzoku* are the true masters and “authentic” speakers of Japanese language), but it had to be reborn not as a national language but as an imperial language, always already racialized.

Thinking about *kokugo* this way, Ueda’s conception of race becomes rather suggestive. He claims:

Any nation has one or a few races. Therefore, I do not believe that national subjects should be limited to one race. For example, among the Westerners, there are Italians, French, and Germans, just as among the Japanese people, there are people of imperial descent (皇別), descendants of Amatsukami and Kunitsukami (神別), as well as those descendants of the feudal domains (藩別).⁵

One can easily see that the terms “nation” and “race” are in flux here, but perhaps most interestingly, for Ueda, *jinshu* is conflated with class. The imagined “whiteness” is in many ways a matter of class or privilege. Those who belong to the most “civilized,” privileged community do so precisely by laying claim to what is imagined as “civilized.”

What is involved in such a construction of *kokugo* as whiteness? How can Ueda produce such *kokugo* with any sense of reality? In order to unravel this complex process, I wish to focus on two elements in Ueda’s reform: his obsession with the “present” and “speech”—both of which have been primarily attributed to his study of cutting-edge linguistic theories in Germany. But before elaborating on Ueda’s reform, I wish to briefly discuss the forms of literary history that his contemporaries were compiling, all in the name of nation formation. That will help show what Ueda’s conception of the “nation” was responding to, and it will allow me to highlight how he radically departs from the nation to produce his “white” imperial language.

As mentioned before, *bungaku* was language, and it is thus not a coincidence that language textbooks featured literary histories. The literary histories that Meiji ideologues took as their model arose in late seventeenth- to early eighteenth-century Europe. They embodied a growth of “the historical sense” that accompanied an increasing interest in the individual’s place in history.⁶ Following this trend, there was an increase in the biographical reading of poetry, which became prominent in the eighteenth century. Literary histories were compiled accordingly by focusing on the process of creation by individual poets and emphasizing the writer’s background. With the advent of Social Darwinism in the nineteenth century, moreover, the focus further shifted to social evolution, which placed the

individual in a shared sociological space. By logical extension, literary texts were deemed an expression of the social, political, and cultural environment of a given work's production. Perhaps the most far-reaching work in this vein is *History of English Literature* (1863) by Hippolyte Taine, known as the founder of the sociological study of literature. Posing the famous "race-milieu-moment" as a formula that constructs literary history, Taine sought to identify the national *Volk* expressed through texts, capturing the *Volk* as a product of its political, social and natural environment.

It is important to note here that Taine recognized the relationship between language and race in his project of social organization. Any "social organization" requires various indexes of identity. That is to say, when the question is how to create a society that is equal to itself and different from other societies, one requires a principle of organization. Defining "race" in this race-milieu-moment formula, Taine says the following: "What we call the race is the innate and hereditary dispositions which man brings with him to the light, and which, as a rule, are united with the marked differences in the temperament and structures of the body."⁷ Race was the primary index in his social organization project. In his framework, racial disposition was then affected by what he called the milieu, which refers to the environment, as well as what he called "moment," which signified the "momentum" of past and present traditions.

Taine's work was widely read by Meiji ideologues, who sought to compile their own works of literary history. Literary historians in Japan started compiling histories closely following Taine's model in 1890.⁸ Their works marked a shift in the way literary historians situated texts. The traditional, antiquarian literary studies were a study of "dead" texts, as it were. Instead, new scholars of "national literature" (*kokubungaku*) sought to read texts as a reflection of the time, of social organization, and of the people's inner spirit. We thus see many references to words like "*jinsei no kagami*" (mirror of life), "*jisei no han'ei*" (reflection of the time), and *shakai no hansha kagami* (a reflective mirror of society) in situating works of literature.⁹ Such compilation of history was often characterized as a "scientific approach" to literature, referring to the Social Darwinian framework upon which their narratives were written.¹⁰

In describing texts as a reflection of time, literary historians constantly linked the texts to people's *shin-teki seikatsu* (internal lives) and *kanjō shisō* (emotions and thoughts). Mikami Sanji and Takasu Kuwasaburō's *Nihon bungakushi* (*History of Japanese Letters*, 1890), for example, claims that "literature is a reflection of people's mind" which embodies emotions, customs and taste.¹¹ Haga Yaichi, in compiling *Kokubungakushi jikkō* (*Ten Lectures on National Literary History*, 1899), says that literary history traces "the thoughts and feelings of our ancestors, expressed through our national language."¹² Takeshima Hagaromo sought to discover the "vicissitudes of our people's spirit" (*kokumin ga seishin no hensen*) and identify their "internal movements" (*naimen teki katsudō*).¹³ Mikami and Takasu's *Nihon*

bungakushi, which included writings of “history, philosophy, political studies and also science,” highlights the mutual relationship between the writings and socio-political phenomena: “literature is affected by politics, influenced by religion, and accompanies the transformation in feelings and customs,” but literature also takes on power of its own and “becomes that which affects politics, religion, emotions and manners.”¹⁴ In his *Kokubungakushi jikkō*, Haga also claims, “The individual was produced by the historical time and expressed the historical time through literature, but the individual also shaped the spirit of the time.”¹⁵ As many critics have noted, among the many objectives that literary historians had was the production of a national collective with a shared history by identifying the “Japaneseness” inscribed in literary works.

The link between literature, history, and nation that these literary histories infallibly create must be examined in the context of the “new modern time” that Japan adopted in the first decade of Meiji period, which significantly altered the sense of time and space. As shown by Narita Ryūichi, and later more extensively by Stephan Tanaka, Japan adopted the Western calendar in 1873, which forced people to reorient their lives.¹⁶ One of the decisive changes here can be seen in the redefinition of nature, with which the lunar calendar had close affinity. Nature was reconfigured as “milieu,” a conceptual site that provided the means to permanence and transhistorical spirit. Tanaka discusses how the discovery of “milieu” in the Japanese archipelago—and hence the removal of nature’s earlier significance—allowed historians to find a shared space that linked the people of the past to the present as “Japanese.” The production of history as narrative, as Tanaka aptly points out, must also be historicized in this context, because it is history that “provides the technology to establish that permanence of place and simultaneously a narrative of change (development).”¹⁷ The result of this narrative was on the one hand a sense of the global (because it shares a narrative structure with its Western counterparts) and on the other a sense of the particular of being “Japanese.” The apparently contradictory forces of permanence and change are inscribed in narratives of literary history, which is clearly implicated in this new linear, homogeneous time.

In defining *kokugo*, Ueda retained the internal focus, one that is similar to the literary historians. In his “Kokugo to kokka to,” Ueda claims the following:

The language that a given citizenry (*jinmin*) speak and their characteristics are very intricately connected. What one citizenry feels via a phenomenon or what the citizenry thinks about anything is reflected in its language. Thus I do not hesitate to designate language as a manifestation of the speakers’ thoughts and emotions in their spiritual life.¹⁸

His definition of language is almost identical to how literary historians situated “literature.” Yet Ueda departs radically from that perspective by focusing on the “present.” In “Nihon gengo kenkyūhō” (“Research Methods on the Japanese Language”), a text based on a lecture Ueda delivered in 1889, he says:

Language has life and death. Language has its genealogy. In the language we now employ, there are things that have been alive for decades and others that have been assimilated recently. . . . The benefits will be great if we investigate what currently exists as compared to investigating photographs.¹⁹

By “photographs,” he means written scripts, and I will return to his focus on spoken language later in the chapter. But what he is promoting here is a focus on what “currently exists,” rather than going back into the past like literary historians. This focus on the present can also be seen from his “Kokubungaku shogen” (“Preface to National Literature”), compiled in 1890. A textbook of national literature, which primarily takes quotes from the Tokugawa and Meiji periods, this text was written prior to his trip to Germany. The plan was to publish a series of volumes, but they never appeared. In planning these volumes, however, Ueda interestingly reversed the conventional order and started with the “present.”²⁰ Literary history of the time typically began in antiquity and proceeded to the present, tracing the “Japaneseness” that had seemingly existed from antiquity. As we saw in the previous chapter, *kokubun* scholars attempted to define what made certain prose or poetry “Japanese,” focusing on things like *te ni o ha* particles. This was, of course, an attempt to privilege the *kundoku* style, a local system of grammar that parsed *kanbun*, and hence differentiating (or constructing) “Japanese” prose from *kanbun*. Ueda’s insistence on the present went directly against such a method of producing “Japan.” The implication of Ueda’s rejection is rather radical. In the creation of *kokugo*, when the constructed continuity of a nation is of utmost importance, *kokugo* in Ueda’s conceptualization severs itself from the past. It features a revolutionary view, an attempt to “nationalize” by rejecting the past. Perhaps more accurately, the past by which “Japan” was constructed until now is rejected.

I do not mean to posit Ueda as an anti-nationalist or non-nationalist. After all, he posits “Nihongo” as “the spiritual blood of the Japanese people.”²¹ In many ways, it is precisely because he conceptualized *kokugo* as an imperial language that ought to be spoken by those beyond “Japan” that he had to sever his *kokugo* from the “Japaneseness” that was created by literary histories. This “Japan” was too limited, as literary histories, through the privileging of the “milieu,” posited the link between language and the political, the social and natural environment. In such a paradigm, the “shared Japan” is geographically and socially bound. In order to posit *kokugo* as the unifying force of Asia, the embodiment of “imperial whiteness,” Ueda needed to sever *kokugo* from the literary history model. Ueda thus negates one form of the “national” and nationalism to re-form it with the more expansive view of conceptualizing an empire. Yet, as we have seen, he retains a part of the Taine model, the “internal focus” that is further evidence of the logic of “naturalization” that we saw earlier. This is inextricably linked to his privileging of the *yamato minzoku*. In this paradigm, *yamato minzoku* will always be the most authentic and “natural” speakers of the Japanese language. In order to

sustain this center, everyone else will be “racialized” or marked as “a minority” that can only fall short of linguistic mastery.

It must also be noted that in the literary history model, race does not appear as an index of identity; instead, the subjects are “Japanese people” or “our people.” There is here an erasure, suggestive of a disavowal. Given that Japan entered an already heavily racialized world order, it was vital to disavow “yellowness.” *Minzoku* (what eventually became ethnicity or ethnic nation) was produced as a focal point by which to differentiate the Japanese from the Chinese and Koreans and hence claim superiority. The Japanese could disavow their “yellowness” if they could act “white” vis-à-vis the rest of East Asia. This is part of the reason why the terms *jinshu* and *minzoku* were still in flux at the time of Ueda’s writing. The textual fluctuations show us that these indexes of identity do not have any fixed, concrete existence. Japanese intellectuals were still probing various ways in which they could act “white,” whether consciously or otherwise. To ignore such fluctuation and focus exclusively on ethnocentrism, therefore, can only result in complicity with this disavowal.

The link to *kokugo* and Japanese thoughts (*shisō*) and emotions needs further elaboration, especially in light of how such discourse was later used in the colonies to justify Japanese language education. On the one hand, it is something “internal” and hence limited to the so-called “Japanese people.” But it is also a *shisō* that Japan attained through its efforts to “modernize” since the Meiji Restoration. And *kokugo* is the ultimate embodiment of this “modernized” Japan. This is precisely why Ueda retains the link between *shisō* and internal life that was employed by literary historians. Language embodies the development of *shisō*—and that is precisely the “Japanese” (modern) *shisō* that ought to be disseminated in the colonies.

Such privileging of *kokugo* is everywhere apparent, especially as a regulative idea by which other languages were studied in the framework of comparative linguistics. Comparative linguistics was a form of “science” not only in Japan but throughout Europe. Take for instance an example I gave earlier in chapter 1 of this book, an ideological view proposed by Friedrich von Schlegel (1772–1829): Indo-European languages were “inflectional languages,” which, Schlegel claimed, could express “complex ideas through a single word: the root contains the main idea, the syllables that serve to form derived words express accessory modifications, and the inflections express variable relations.” For Schlegel, these languages, as the most advanced form of languages, were the only medium that could bring about “any improvement of the human spirit.”²² Notice here the inextricable link between language and human “progress.” In contrast, the “isolating languages,” among which he classified “Chinese,” showed no inflection, were “made up of monosyllables that we cannot even call roots,” and could only be “lifeless,” hence the least advanced and an impediment to progress.

Ueda’s curriculum in Hakugengaku (then a term for Linguistics) at Tokyo Imperial University, through which he produced a great many linguists who were

deployed to the colonies to theorize Japanese language education, was primarily comparative linguistics. Ogura Shinpei (1882–1944) focused on Korean, Iha Fuyū on the Ryūkyū language, Kindaichi Kyōsuke on Ainu, Ogawa Naoki on Taiwanese—in fact, he was later sent to Taiwan to teach Japanese.²³ Kindaichi later recalls that the reason he selected the Ainu language was because Ueda lamented that there were no Ainu language specialists around him. Among the students, there was also Kanazawa Shōsaburō, who studied Korean, Ainu, and Ryūkyū, and would later go on to publish *Nikkan ryōkokugo dōkei ron* (*Common Origins of Japanese and Korean Languages*, 1910) and *Nissen dōso ron* (*Common Ancestry of Japanese and Koreans*, 1929), which I will touch upon later. I certainly cannot do justice to the details of the studies that these scholars offered. Of course, they were extremely sincere in their endeavors, attempting to lay out the varying structures of existing languages. Despite the varying nature of the studies, however, such comparative linguistics presented a structure of “knowledge” that was always already racialized, making *kokugo* the embodiment of “progress” among the “East Asian languages,” the medium for human development to attain the desired level of whiteness.

In his *Kokugogaku jikkō* (*Ten Lectures of the Study of Kokugo*, 1916), Ueda delineates *kokugo*’s position vis-à-vis other East Asian languages. The Ryūkyū language, for example, is for him a “dialect” of *kokugo* and, despite its apparent difference, they are in a sibling relationship.²⁴ The Ryūkyū language, he claims, contains elements that are “extremely similar to quadrigrade conjugation (*yodan katsuyō*)” of *kokugo*, “a characteristic very similar to Japanese before the Nara period,” suggesting that the Ryūkyū language is quite behind its time.²⁵ In his discussion of Korean, Ueda delineates their similarities and says the following:

Despite the fact that Korean language and literature have such similar characteristics as our *kokugo* and share the history of development, they each differ markedly in the development of national literature (*kokumin bungaku*). In Korea, there is no such thing that can be called ‘national literature’ written in Korean in a pure sense. This is a result of the ethnic nation’s character, but also their obsession with their admiration for the powerful and their devotion to Chinese literature. As a result, they never worked toward improving their own national language.²⁶

This is rather ironic, as Ueda is critical of written language or what is considered to be national literature in Japan, but the supposed lack of national literature in Korea (which of course is not true) is used as a sign of backwardness, positing Japanese *kokugo* as more superior and hence more progressive.

How then were such ideological views applied to *kokugo* education in the colonies?

Kokugo education was not systematically carried out in all Japan’s colonies. In more ways than one, it appears to have been a process of trial and error. Take Okinawa, for example. Despite what Ueda says about the affinity of the two languages, in practice, it was necessary to first train translators. After that, they

created textbooks that would print Japanese with glosses in the Ryūkyū language.²⁷ In Korea, the Japanese language was taught in public schools even before the annexation of Korea in 1910, but the forceful implementation of Japanese-only education did not begin until the 1930s. The variation of the actual practices of *kokugo* education in the “colonies” is beyond the scope of this chapter. But it is worth noting the issues at stake when *kokugo* education in the colonies was contemplated, and how they engage with the racialization of language that I am discussing. To do so, let me focus on the project of assimilation in Korea.

As Yasuda Toshiaki succinctly discusses, after the annexation of Korea in 1910, the term 国語 *kokugo* (or *kugo* in Korean), which until then referred to the Korean language, was changed to signify Japanese, and Korean simply became *Chōsen-go* (or Korean).²⁸ The “Chōsen kyōikurei” (“Edict of Education in Korea”), published August 24, 1911, offers an interesting glimpse into the ideology underlying the educational policies to be implemented in Korea. Articles 2 and 8 are pertinent:

Article 2: Education will be carried out based on the imperial edict to cultivate good and loyal national subjects (*kokumin*).

Article 8: The common school (*futsū gakkō*) is a space that will offer common education (*futsū kyōiku*) that is the core of national subject education; it will be a place that is mindful of physical development, a place to teach *kokugo* and moral education to cultivate characteristics of national subjects and offer knowledge and techniques that are necessary for the lives of national subjects.²⁹

Note the inextricable link established between *kokugo* and the production of loyal and upright national subjects, signifying “imperial subject” in these articles. *Kokugo* was further linked to the “modern,” which is evident in *kokugo* textbooks. *Kokugo chōsa iinkai* (the Committee of *Kokugo* Research) was founded in 1902, with members such as Ueda Kazutoshi, Maejima Hisoka (the writer who called for the abolishment of *kanji* as early as 1867), and Ōtsuki Fumihiko, the compiler of the dictionary *Genkai* (*Sea of Words*). It published two textbooks based on members’ research into various dialects: *Kōgohō* (*Grammar of Spoken Language*, 1916) and *Kōgohō bekki* (*Additional Grammar of Spoken Language*, 1917). In the preface to the latter work, Ōtsuki writes:

In Tokyo, there is the imperial palace and the government. As a result, people of the entire country are beginning to emulate the Tokyo dialect. As such, it is clear that the Tokyo dialect needs to be the target for our spoken language of the entire nation. But the Tokyo dialect of the vulgar people has too strong an accent, so we can’t take that. So we took as our target the language of those in Tokyo who are educated. In addition, we collected those words widely in use in the entire nation and set our rules. The rules of spoken grammar that we put forth in this book were produced in this manner. Taiwan and Korea have entered our honorable country. In order to make the vulgar natives (*dojin*) like those of us in this honorable country, it is first important to teach our spoken language.³⁰

I will return to the issue of the Tokyo dialect later. The clear assumption in this passage is that Taiwanese and Korean natives are less developed and that the only way for them to “enter our honorable country” is through the language of *kokugo*. The Japanese language embodies “civilization.” Such discourse was rampant around the time of annexation. Take, for example, Horie Hideo’s 1905 essay entitled “Nihongo no sekaiteki chii” (“The Status of Japanese Language in the World”):

Our *kokugo* is something that our fifty million compatriots are always speaking, communicating with one another and exchanging knowledge. The *shisō* of the Japanese ethnic nation (*minzoku*), the civilization itself, is engrained in our *kokugo*. *Kokugo* is not only our cherished treasure, but for anyone to engage with Japan, trade with us, wish to research our world, and desire to absorb oneself in the advantages of this civilization, it is of the utmost importance that they study this Japanese language.³¹

The more “inauthentic” speakers of *kokugo* (the language of whiteness) they can create, the more “authentic” the imagined dominant majority become. That is to say, by continuing to produce minorities and the less civilized other, the more “white” the “authentic” *yamato minzoku* become. Whiteness, which can never be fully accessed, can only be reaffirmed through the continuous reproduction of the less-white.

It was in this context that the theory of “common origins” of Japanese and Korean (both in terms of language and ethnicity) were introduced. Kanazawa Shōsaburō, who studied with Ueda at Tokyo Imperial University, delineated the commonality between Korean and Japanese in his *Nikkan ryōkokugo dōkeiron*, arguing that Korean was in fact a “branch of Japanese” (the English translation is provided along with the original text). The logical conclusion that one derives from such a theory is that precisely because of this, it is easy for Koreans to learn the “civilized” language of Japanese.³²

The need for such “inauthentic speakers” is inextricably linked to the fact that *kokugo*, as defined by Ueda, has no fixed, concrete existence. This is clear from the fact that Ueda’s rejection of the past is accompanied by his obsession with spoken language. In his “Nihon gengo kenkyūhō,” he asserts that the object of linguistics is “language as such” (*gengo sono mono*), which he qualifies as the following:

The most scientific definition of language is this: it is a spoken sound unit that is uttered by a person’s mouth, heard by another person’s ear; it is a sign (*fuchō*) that people use to communicate their thoughts. Language is sound, thus written script (*moji*) is not language. If one likens it to a person, [written scripts] are like photographs that capture one moment, one instance, which means that, while the sound can change, the script will remain the same. . . . Until now, it seems that scholars of Japanese language have only studied these photographs. I must say that they have only studied a single period of language.³³

Here, “language as such” is defined first and foremost by “a spoken sound unit” uttered by someone and heard by another. Despite the fact that it is a “sign” (*fuchō*),

it is defined against “written script,” which, as Ueda’s photograph metaphor tells us, does not manifest the change in sound. For Ueda, *kokugo* was equivalent to the language of “voice,” and *bungaku* or *kokubun* was equivalent to the language of *moji* (letters). In other words, for Ueda, *genko* (*kokugo*) and *moji* (*kokubun*) constituted two separate modes of expression, one via voice, and the other via letters.

Such emphasis on the present and “spoken” language engages well with the forms of linguistics that Ueda studied in Germany. As the study of Western linguistics tried to establish itself as part of the growing body of natural sciences in the nineteenth century, scholars sought to focus on “living” languages as opposed to “dead” languages, which were presumably the object of study of classical philologists from which linguistics sought to differentiate itself.³⁴ The “living” language referred to the language “currently in use,” and precisely because of this, it privileged sound and the pronunciation of words and phrases.

What we find is a desire to sever “*genko*” from all past writings; it was not only “literary writings,” as many critics have pointed out. Such an interpretation derives from an anachronistic positing of the division between language (*genko*) and literature (*bungaku*) that has yet to be produced.

We see here Ueda’s desire to prioritize the present, and yet, significantly, this “present” does not include present writings. For Ueda, written scripts are like photographs that can only be a static representation of language at a given moment. As he acknowledges, language has a genealogy, but what makes something language is its phonetic manifestation in the present. It is only the sound that changes—or rather, it is the changes in sound that make a language, language. In effect, he proposes a radical reinvention of “language” through spoken sound. It must thus be noted that *genko*, in this case, is far from an equivalent of Saussurean *langue*, as it completely excludes writing. In this dynamic, Ueda is still driven by the need to consolidate spoken language as *kokugo*, and writing with it comes sometime in the future.

But if Ueda were to reject all past writings, where then does he turn to create his *kokugo*? He must find an entirely different source of language that is untapped, or one that has yet to be *registered* as language. The implication is that anything that is already written, already somewhere functioning as a sign, cannot be included. Such production of language is fundamentally impossible. Language will always retain its past trace, whether spoken or written, whether one is conscious of this or not. For a given language to be a sign, it must fundamentally be repeatable, carrying within itself a trace of all previous utterances. A sign is a mark that is necessarily displaced from one utterance to the next, but a sign cannot be a sign without repetition.

What Ueda sought, however, was the production of new language through the collection of dialects that are actually being “currently used somewhere.” In more ways than one, *Kōgohō* and *Kōgohō bekki*, the textbooks compiled and published in 1916 and 1917 that I referred to earlier, were clearly in line with his views. Take,

for example, Ueda's "Hyōjungo ni tsukite" ("On Standard Language"), published over a decade before the textbooks. Here, he sets forth the need for a standardized language based on an extensive study of currently used language:

Among the many languages that are spoken in one country, [the standard language] is one that most people everywhere in the country can understand, unlike the local dialects that are only spoken in a certain locale. . . . Although the standard language is an ideal form, if we trace its origin, it is one form of dialect. And that dialect, through a number of artificial polishings, attains transcendental status. . . . The standard language must correctly transcend local dialects. In addition, it must be collected and selected from the actually existing essence, to which we add our research and solidify unification. As such, the standard language must be one that is possible to be spoken in real life. No, it must be spoken by someone somewhere in the present.³⁵

As we saw earlier in the preface to *Kōgohō bekki*, ultimately he and his followers selected the "Tokyo dialect of the educated men" to produce such standard language. But most importantly, there is an obvious contradiction in this passage that stems from the impossibility of what Ueda seeks. On the one hand, he claims that "standard language" is an "ideal" form of language that can be understood by people in the country. It is something that is "artificially" produced, one that "transcends" all local languages. Yet it is also something that "has to be spoken by someone somewhere in the present," as it is a language that is "collected." Ueda falls into a bind here: he must acknowledge the non-existence of standard language, as it has to be artificially produced. Yet it must be an existing language.

It is important to recall that the desire underlying Ueda's project is to create a new "national," based on a language that can be equal to English, French, and other colonialist languages, which will eventually become "the common language of Asia." Whether or not Ueda was actually conscious of this is not an issue. But the rejection of "writing" and positing of the "spoken" is not just about implementing the cutting-edge German linguistic theories he had studied. In light of the contemporaneous movement to construct "Japan" and "Japaneseness" through preexisting texts that were linked to the *volk* of the nation, Ueda's obsession with spoken language represents a radical rejection of a certain type of nationalism. At the level of methodology, Ueda was also arguing against the attempt to find a standard of grammar in past writings; the standard for consolidating his *kokugo* had to be found in the present—in the spoken language which had yet to be developed. He thus sought to create *kokugogaku* as a study to establish *kokugo*. His rejection of the past, therefore, was not limited to past writings, but was also the study of them. What he sought, in other words, had yet to exist: both language as *gengo* and the form of study that produces this language.

Yet in "Hyōjungo ni tsukite" such rejection leads him to a paradox, an interesting one that requires unpacking. As Ueda himself admits, the standard language does not exist; it can only be an ideal form. Spoken languages vary infinitely, and it is, as Ueda's definition of sound (language) suggests, constantly changing. Any

attempt to halt the changes, which is ultimately what “standardization” signifies, can only fall short. And yet, it must also be said that it is precisely this gap between the “ideal” and the “actual” that allows Ueda to empower *kokugo*. *Kokugo* is an idea that is empty; it is an ideal form to which one aspires and yet one can never actually reach.

Ueda was certainly not alone in conceptualizing a language based on collection of dialects. Although he was the central figure in these projects, there were many similar attempts that endorsed Ueda’s views. Take the many *kōgo bunten* (spoken language dictionaries) that began to appear around at the turn of the century. Even when Ueda himself was not involved in their compilation, they specifically excluded the many “literary” works that sought to incorporate *genbun’itchi* prose. Furthermore, many *kōgo bunten* took the form of “collection” of dialects. In effect, a discursive condition in which the idea of collection of dialects leads toward the establishment of *kokugo* began to gain consensus around this time.

There is also a regional specificity in standard language. Ueda claims that it ought to emulate a specific Tokyo dialect: “What I mean by Tokyo language refers to the language that educated people speak in Tokyo.”³⁶ By “educated” he is defining it against “Edo dialect” such as ベランメー. Interestingly, however, while the many *kōgo bunten* often designate Tokyo dialect as the potential standard, most spend more time and space “collecting” not the Tokyo dialect but other local dialects.³⁷ In effect, here too, we find a gap between the ideal and actual: Tokyo dialect, which is presumably the model of “ideal,” remains empty, while the actual “collection” is centered on local dialects. In effect, the ideal form (that is, Tokyo dialect) is being produced precisely through local dialects. It is a formation through the identification of “deviation”: once the “deviation” is identified, so is the “standard” form. I must of course add here that “local dialects” are also being produced in this process as “deviation.”

Whether Ueda was conscious of this or not, the emptiness of *kokugo* is precisely what allowed him to empower *kokugo* as an object of desire. This is precisely the structure of racialization. It is not present, but it appears to be present. It is an object that can never be possessed, but it is supposed to be somewhere. The many subsequent reforms in the colonies thus featured a production of imperfect/inauthentic “Japanese speakers,” the invariably hierarchized “subjects” who “desire” to belong to the Japanese Empire, thereby further enabling *kokugo* to act “white.” Such repetition can only empower it even further.

When scholarship focuses almost exclusively on ethnocentrism in Ueda’s language reform, it loses sight of racialization and becomes complicit with the project of racialization itself. It is around the time Ueda was writing that the concept of *minzoku* became stabilized as ethnicity or ethnic nation, though his own writings still show some instability. Race was always on the minds of Japanese intellectuals, who were forced to negotiate with their violently labeled “yellowness.” In order to disavow this “yellowness” and act “white” in East Asia, they began to revolve their

entire nation/empire building project around ethnocentrism. The absence of race in previous scholarship is also symptomatic of the archive-centered Japan Studies field. By simply focusing on the object of knowledge, one can completely lose sight of this disavowal.

I cannot overemphasize the importance of reinscribing race in our work to critically engage with our field. The very fact that Japan Studies exists in its current form is already a product of racialization. Just as a racialized worldview entered Japan in the Meiji period as a form of science, we too have inherited the structure of the forms of knowledge which are very much implicated in such a framework. We don't have to look too far. Western philosophy presents itself as the "normative philosophy" while "Japanese philosophy" is merely a yellow version of that. Area Studies, which was produced as the world reorganized itself at the end of World War II with the United States as center, reproduces this framework. If we simply ghettoize ourselves in the "study of Japan" as an object, without calling attention to how such an object becomes constituted in the first place, and without calling attention to the always already structured raciality inscribed in it, we can only become complicit with this structure of racialization.