1 Standard Japanese and its others: Building the national language

What is *Nihongo* 'the Japanese language'? In Chapter 1, we start by asking this very basic question. The answer to this question is often so taken for granted as being "what the Japanese people speak" that Japanese is frequently referred to as *kokugo* '[Japanese] national language'. A second prevalent assumption is that *kokugo* is *Nihongo*, which, in modernity, is equivalent to *hyōjungo* 'standard language' or *kyōtsūgo* 'common language'[1] spoken (or speakable) by everyone everywhere in Japan. This view of *Nihongo* is one result of a national language policy that has promoted Standard Japanese since the advent of the modern Japanese nation-state in the Meiji period (1868–1912). These common assumptions effectively erase (Irvine and Gal 2000) speakers of regional dialects, class dialects, and ethnic dialects, as well as those members of the Japanese nation who did (or do) not speak Japanese, as the story of the construction of Standard Japanese unfolds.[2]

In this chapter, we review the historical background to contemporary Japanese language policies, the changes that have taken place under the "democratization" processes of the post-WWII decades, and media-circulated norms with regard to Standard versus other varieties of Japanese. There has been substantial research on the historical process of the formation of Standard Japanese (e.g., Carroll 2001; Gottlieb 2012; Heinrich 2012; Komori 2000; Koyama 2003; Lee 1996; Sanada 1991; Twine 1991; Yasuda 1999, 2007). We draw on these and other works to consider how Standard Japanese was constructed and promoted in early modern Japan, and how official policies have changed the contours of the ideological frame which defines Standard Japanese as "the" language of the Japanese nation and within which its residents negotiate language use today. We follow our sketch of the official policies with their

[1] A post-WWII term which will be discussed later in this chapter.

[2] The story of the making of "the" Japanese language focuses on efforts to eradicate regionally distinct dialects rather than social dialects such as class dialects, a point raised by folklorist Ikeda Yasaburō in a 1977 round-table discussion on standard language and dialect. Co-discussant linguist Shibata Takeshi added that class dialects were a "foreign category" (*gaikoku no bunrui*) and that the term *hōgen* 'dialect' meant, in Japanese, *regional* dialect *tout court* (E. Iwabuchi *et al.* 1977: 20–21).

reflexes in educational directives and a review of how these norms manifest in practice in popular (media) settings.[3]

1.1 Standard Japanese: A building block in the making of modern Japan

1.1.1 1870s–1945

The history of the Japanese language as it emerged in the modernizing, nation-building projects of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is often narrated in a fairly straightforward fashion: reopened forcibly to contact with the world, Japan immediately perceived the need to modernize (that is, industrialize and militarize) in order to stave off colonization by Western powers. Delegations were sent to North America and Western Europe to study all manner of modern institutions, such as government structures, modern armies and navies, education systems, and the like. One such modern "institution" was the notion of a national language, or more precisely, the idea that a modern nation-state should have a single national (standard) language, following the European ideology of one-nation one-language (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998; Gal and Irvine 1995; Hansen-Thomas 2007). The construction of standardized national languages in the service of modernity had its foundations in Europe,[4] but other, later-modernizing countries, Japan among them, followed suit. And so one variety of Japanese, a variety supposedly used by educated Tōkyōites, was selected as a basis, and a national language was "born" and disseminated to all through the new universal compulsory education system, itself based on the French system, promulgated by the *Gakusei* 'Education Law' of 1872 (Duke 2009).[5]

[3] Throughout, we will focus on the policies and effects *within* Japan, which will leave a temporal gap during Japan's colonial expansion, since during that period the primary focus was on creating a Japanese language suited for the colonial subject rather than on what to do with those "at home" who were not yet fully aligned with the Standard Japanese policies of the early modernizing period. This is not due to a wish to paper over the significant linguistic subjugation that formed the core of the Japanese colonial expansion projects regarding language during the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, as Yamashita (2001) suggests about Japanese sociolinguistics and language policy historiography in general, but rather because these projects have less relevance to today's Japanese sociolinguistic foci (and exclusions) than to policies related to incorporating subjugated peoples into the national body. We, of course, acknowledge the mutually shaping effects of the colonial policies and practices regarding language and the development of theoretical points of interest and methodologies in the homeland. For readers interested in works on the colonial period and language policy, see Hirataka (1992), Miyajima (1999).

[4] Gal (2012: 28–29) refers to the language standardizing that occurred in Europe in the nineteenth century as a monolingual project that "swept" the continent; this project, we argue, has largely "swept" the world with the dominant ideal of monolingualism.

[5] It is important to keep in mind the very strict limitations on the "universal" nature of the compulsory education system in the Meiji era; the "compulsory" portion of the new education system as specified by the Ministry of Education in 1872 required sixteen months (extended to four years

But the birth of the national language was neither automatic nor simple. One of the first difficult issues language policy encountered concerned the need for a script system and writing style that conformed to each other; having a written language that was enough like the spoken language for all Japanese to be able to read had not previously been part of Japanese literacy and the desirability of such a bringing together of writing and speaking, or *genbun itchi*, was highly contested (Heinrich 2012: 53–55). In the heat of that controversy relatively less attention was paid to the complexities of developing a single variety of spoken Japanese sufficient for the needs of citizens of the modern nation-state, much less the complexities of bringing a diverse population[6] of subjects to accept and speak in that new uniform language code. The social politics of this latter endeavor have yet to be fully explored. Indeed, even as late as 2010, it was possible to claim that "until recent years, most of the research on the historical 'modernization' of the language used in literary writing in Japan has not explored to any significant extent the sociopolitical causes or effects of such modernization" (Essertier 2010: 245). This is even more the case, we argue, for the "modernization" of the spoken language, although there are recent exceptions (see, e.g., Heinrich 2012). It is also quite rare for discussions of Japanese language policy and policy changes to be addressed from a global perspective rather than be confined solely to the Japanese case.

Here, we offer a look at the ideological functions of Japanese policies aimed at producing a "standard language culture" (J. Milroy 2001), both past and present, within which a population much more various than the famously "homogeneous" one of Japanese self-narratives operates in and through its speaking and writing practices. As Carroll (2001: 1) aptly notes, knowing about a nation's language policies can shed light on a number of that nation's interests. In the Japanese case, it offers a window on how the Japanese officialdom emphasized its interest in maintaining (or developing) a "Japanese" cultural heritage and how it viewed language as a vehicle for displaying a modern Japan to the wider world. It can also show how Japan has, from the beginning of its emergence as a modern nation, conformed with the wider global (or,

in 1886, then six years in 1907) of elementary education for children starting at age six, and even for that the children's families had to pay, leading to many families failing to send their children to school. Middle school and university were reserved for social elites, so that universality at the lower level gave way to an overtly class-based system thereafter; this aspect of the modern education system is, however, not part of the core narrative of educational equality in modern Japan. But it must be noted that class-based inequalities were not entirely removed from the post-War reformed system (A. Okada 2012).

[6] And the speaking population was, in fact, very diverse, as we see below. In the first years of Meiji, diversity manifested as caste/class differences (remnants of the status-based Tokugawa system), a few ethnic differences (Ainu, Ryūkyūans, plus any resident Chinese or Korean ethnic populations), as well as the regional dialect differences that are the focus of this chapter.

more properly, Western European) discourses of what language policy should be, and offers a window into where it stands vis-à-vis similar discourses today.

It is critical to appreciate the struggles over the cultural capital of language during the early years of Meiji, when "the specters of failed Japanese sovereignty, abjected Japanese masculinity, and failed personal autonomy" triggered conflicted anxieties about how to articulate Japan as a "civilized" nation both to Japanese subjects and to the modern Western nations with which they desired to stand on equal footing (Anderson 2009: 9–11; see also Essertier 2010; LeBlanc 2012). And the years of the unequal Ansei treaties are perhaps of particular importance. The Ansei treaties, variously signed and terminated between the years 1854–1873 were unilateral treaties that gave special privileges of trade to sixteen Western nations. The "most onerous and humiliating" features were a) unfairly low custom duties; b) consular jurisdiction putting citizens of the treaty nations outside the Japanese law; and c) a most favored nations provision for the Western treaty nations (Perez 1999: 47ff).

As N. Sakai (2005: 14) notes about the imaginary of "the West" in Japan, "what this cultural imaginary implies is a history in which it has been possible to force commands upon people in a threatening form." This was a moment in history where "the West" as an imaginary had significant force in influencing Japanese political and policymaking elites. It was quickly apparent to these elites that one necessary component of the desired equal footing would be the development of a standard language that could be understood (and spoken and, in some senses most critically, *read*) by the new state's new citizens.[7] As in the case of many late-developing societies, social science (of which language planning is one) in Japan grew out of state concerns rather than from grass-roots agency (Barshay 2004: 396). Policymaking was, thus, top-down and, throughout the 1870s–1880s the government-sponsored importation of Western systems of organization, among which was the idea of the necessity of a standard language (Gottlieb 1995). In the Meiji period projects of standard language building, several aspects of spoken language were particularly targeted along with, although slightly lagging behind, efforts to create a uniform script. The earliest efforts were directed at establishing Standard Japanese by eradicating regional dialects and unifying the written and spoken forms around the new standard (Heinrich 2012; Twine 1991; Wetzel 2004).

Shohamy (2006: 97) discerns three models for nations' language planning: the *assimilative* model, wherein the linguistic or other contributions of non-dominant populations were not valued and all populations were expected to assimilate to the dominant group; the *recognition* model, in which appreciation and acknowledgment of non-dominant forms of knowledge

[7] Shibatani (1990: 186) characterizes the situation in terms of developing a standard language being a goal of a "new government that was desperate to join the civilized Western world …"

is articulated and in which non-dominant groups are often encouraged to maintain and cultivate their own language varieties "at least for a temporary period"; and the *interactive* model, which encourages "a two-way action, wherein minority groups' knowledge is seen as affecting and enriching the dominant group." It is important here to recognize that Japan began modernizing when an *assimilative* model of language planning/policymaking was in its ascendant years in Europe and North America, and that this is the model that Japan embraced.

France was one of the earliest nations to contribute to the development of an assimilative view of modern language planning in Europe, and to attempt to create a unified national language. It was also one of the most successful. From the fourteenth century onward, the dialect of French spoken in Paris began to gain a special status vis-à-vis other dialects and languages spoken in France, although the process was much slower in southern France, which continued to use *langue d'oc* (Occitan) for both speaking and writing well into the 1700s (Mesthrie 2000: 346–347). It was not, indeed, until the Revolution of 1789 that "language became an affair of the state" (Brunot 1927: 2). In Volume 9 of his *Histoire de la langage Française des origine à 1900*, Brunot traces post-Revolution language policies, which were based on the modernist conviction that the very term "nation" must be reserved for societies of "men [sic] who speak the same language" (1927: 2). Other varieties of French than the Parisian dialect and other languages spoken within the boundaries of France, such as Occitan, could not be allowed to coexist with the national language since the nationalizing project would flounder without a common soul (*âme*).

"Les idiomes et les patois, sans que personne le voulût, ou même y pensât étaient fédéralistes. Le français était national."

Dialects and local (rough) speech, without anyone willing it to be so, or even thinking about it, was federalist.[8] The French language was national. (Brunot 1927: 7)

Brunot also noted the reduction in status of other dialects to something corrupted or coarse (*patois*) and the reduction in status of independent languages, such as the *langue d'oc* and Breton, to "mere" dialects (*dialectes*). Over time, he noted, this came to seem like a straightforward, perhaps natural, process, although it had, in fact, required considerable time and effort to effect the changes in local practice necessary to unify the French people via a unified French language.

Bourdieu (1991) draws on Brunot's work to argue that, ultimately, legitimating the new, Parisian-based French as the authoritative marker of belonging to the French nation(-state) required the erasure of other formerly "legitimate"

[8] That is, oriented to regional autonomy, with a weaker rather than a stronger central government.

languages and dialects; this was done in part through the modern institutions of state bureaucracy and a nationalized education system. Once legitimated, however, the notions that the French language was Parisian French-based Standard French and that French was the only language spoken in the French nation-state rendered other languages which continued to be used, such as Occitan (*langue d'oc*), "inaudible" by most French people,[9] an instance of the iconization (of Parisian French) and erasure (of other languages) in the indexical process of constructing a national identity. As Gal (2012) notes, this case was hardly unique, although its appearance in France in the mid-eighteenth century certainly preceded movements toward monolingualism in other European states; the monolingual, one-nation one-language model was commonly adopted throughout nineteenth and twentieth-century Europe[10] with varying degrees of success, and exported throughout the world through colonial expansion. This mode of thinking about the relationship of (a single) language per bounded territory persisted well into the first half of the twentieth century. Coming into the monolingual, unified language game in the late 1800s, Japan's efforts to unify and standardize were right in keeping with the times. Unsurprisingly, Japan took assimilation as its starting point.[11]

Thus, language as an organizing principle of a unified society took hold early on in the construction of the Meiji state, but immediately two apparent impediments arose. The first and perhaps most obvious impediment to a language that an entire population of a modern state could use was the significant gap between the spoken language (of any dialectal variant) and written forms in use at the end of the Tokugawa period (1603–1868). A modern state, however, needed a writing system accessible to all. Unification of spoken and written language, therefore, was seen as a pressing need, which itself required a considerable shift to an ideology that speaking and writing were – or should be – the same (Heinrich 2012: 42). Universal, or even widespread, literacy had not been desideratum in premodern Japan, despite the spread of

[9] "Inaudible" in the sense of unrecognizable as anything other than a lesser dialect of French, a condition that persisted until the last decades of the twentieth century, when language activists began to call for its recognition and acceptance as *one of* the languages of France (Boyer 1999; Gardy and Lafont 1981; Marcellesi 1979; Sano 1997). This too is a trend in contemporary Europe and elsewhere throughout the developed world.

[10] With some notable exceptions, such as Switzerland; for a brief overview of how Switzerland developed its very unusual, perhaps even transgressive, multilingual policy from the 1800s through the early decades of the twentieth century, see Grin (1998).

[11] We are here focusing on the top-down approach to the construction of a standard language, or norms. We do not mean to suggest, however, that these norms, no matter how legitimated they are by official policy and official practice, are or ever were taken up without speaker resistance, contestation, and negotiation; the issue of speaker agency serving as an effective force in shaping language practice cannot be ignored (Agha 2003: 270), and will be taken up in Chapter 2.

certain kinds of less formal literacy in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Ikegami 2005: 300–302).

In fact, prior to the Meiji period, class distinctions were assumed and the equal distribution of literacy across the entire population was not imagined; in fact, coming to imagine this was very difficult for many Japanese elites who imagined literacy to be quite properly the prerogative of the elite class and thus opposed the *genbun itchi* 'unification of spoken and written language' project. Class stratification was not only recognized but assumed to be legitimate by these anti-*genbun itchi* elites (Heinrich 2012: 55). It was only once the debate was settled in favor of a unified written and spoken language suited for constructing a population of "citizens" adequate to the demands of the modern state that the door was opened for the second ideological shift, which was to begin to imagine a homogeneous speech community that included, in principle, *all* Japanese. In other words, the way was paved for the creation of a national linguistic community, that socially based unit of linguistic ideological analysis based on assumptions about belonging to a group of people sharing the same language (Silverstein 1996), who would uniformly orient to a homogeneous Standard Japanese language.

And that brings us to the second impediment, the diversity in the dialects of Japanese that coexisted in the archipelago at the time. If one is to develop a writing system and style that is aligned closely with the spoken language, there has to be "a" spoken language to which the new written language can conform. And there wasn't one, as portrayed in Inoue Hisashi's 1985 play written for NHK television, *Kokugo Gannen* 'National Language Year One', a fictional representation of the state of language in early Meiji. There was, rather, a cacophony of regional voices (Carroll 2001: 216; H. Inoue 1986/2002; Robins 2006). *Kokugo Gannen* is set in the period 1872–1875 and depicts issues involved in establishing and enforcing a new standard language. The story starts with reference to the first issue of the Ministry of Education's journal (*Mombushō Zasshi*) in 1874, which emphasized the vast differences among dialects, many of which were, or were held to be, mutually unintelligible (M. Inoue 2002: 5). Nangō Seinosuke, the central character, works for the Ministry of Education and has been ordered to create a *kyōtsū-kōgo* 'common spoken language'. He lives in Tōkyō with his wife, his father-in-law, and numerous servants drawn from various regions across Japan, including Kyōto, Ōsaka, Nagoya, Yamagata, Fukushima, Iwate, and both *yamanote* and *shitamachi* Tōkyō (see Map 2). Nangō and family themselves come from today's Yamaguchi and Kagoshima prefectures.

The story is full of humorous scenes in which these characters misunderstand each other due to their dialectal differences. In the printed version, many of the characters' lines are written both as intelligible expressions (that is, in Standard Japanese) and in dialect versions. In an early scene, for example,

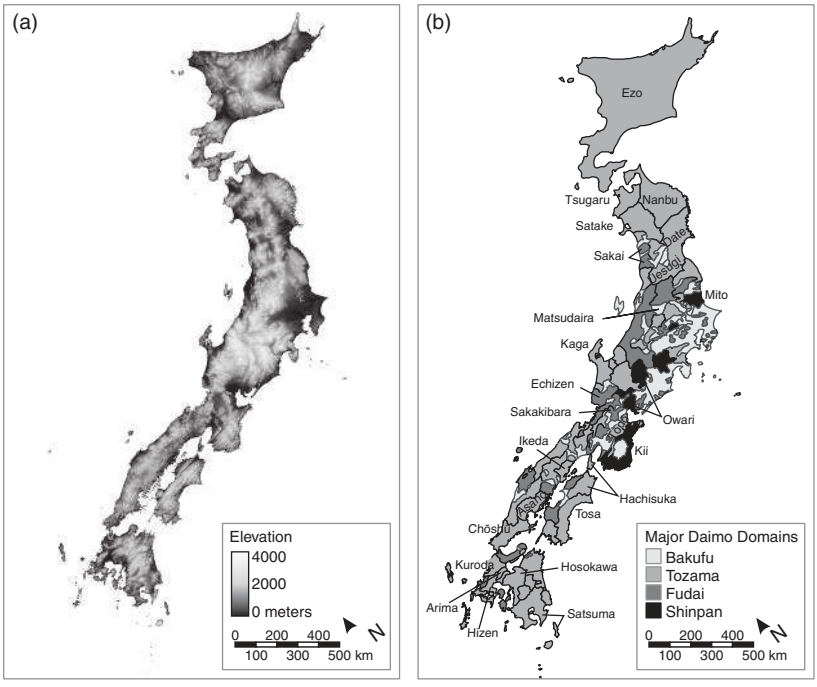

Figure 1.1a. Topographic map of Japan (data USGS 2006; cartography Michele M. Tobias). Figure 1.1b. Domain boundaries during the Tokugawa era (Jansen 2000, Paterson and Kelso 2015; cartography Michele M. Tobias)

Nangō returns to his house and most members of the household come out to greet him with formulaic greetings (equivalent to today's Standard Japanese *O-kaeri nasai*[*mase*] 'Welcome back home'), *Mattyottado, Omodoi naimonse, Otsukareyasu, Omodori nasaimase, Okaen nasee, Kutabitchabe, Gokurohan yatta yanainke, Keeratsushie, Uerukamu hōmu, Yō modotte chiyōta* (Robins 2006: 44–45). Cacophony indeed.

It was, then, necessary not only to construct a writing system for population-wide use, but also a uniform spoken language to go with it. At the beginning of the Meiji period, the canvas for the new linguistic community was divided up into several general areas separated by Japan's difficult topography and associated with distinctive varieties of Japanese. The mountainous Japanese terrain (Figure 1.1a) coupled with a long history of restrictions on travel outside one's own *han* 'domain' (Figure 1.1b) and the orientation toward one's own *han* rather than Japan in general as one's place of true belonging produced a myriad of regionally distinctive dialects by the end of the Tokugawa

(or Edo) period. And that many of these dialects were so distinctive as to be mutually unintelligible came to be firmly established in the minds of the original language planners as a problem, and in the interpretations of much later scholarship on the process of Japanese language scholarship as a "truth" about the language practices of the period.

Shibata Takeshi's (1965) paper on the "rise and fall" of dialects, for example, introduces the topic of how necessary the Meiji period *kokugo-zukuri* 'national language construction' was as follows:

> Under the *han* 'domain' system, because communication among Japanese people as a unified ethnic group (*minzoku to shite*) was artificially cut off, language came to be more unified within domains but gaps developed between domains. These gaps were to become dialect boundaries … It is perhaps the case that Japan's [regional] dialect culture developed the most intensely under the Edo period feudal system. In any event, from the mid-Edo period on, these dialect differences grew to the point that a speaker from one region could not converse intelligibly with a speaker from another. (Shibata 1978/1965: 414)

This point of view is echoed repeatedly in English accounts of the early Meiji period as well, where it is presented as established fact (see, e.g., Noguchi 2001: 4; Shibatani 1990: 185; Twine 1991: 208), although just how this fact was "established" is unclear.[12]

Here, then, we come to the topic that has been at the heart of standard language development since the beginning of the modern period: the construction of *kokugo* '[Japanese] national language'. This entailed selecting or constructing *a* language/variety out of numerous diverse varieties of Japanese. Koyama (2003: 254–257; see also Sanada 1991; Shibatani 1990) outlines some of the precursors to the choice of a suitable form to serve as the basis for the new standard. He points out that until the late eighteenth century, the Ōsaka-Kyōto area served as the source of a lingua franca, but that from that time onwards the Edo elite register became increasingly less influenced by Kyōto norms and more of an independent prestige lingua franca for use among educated *samurai*-class speakers. Koyama stresses, however, that until the Meiji period, this was not a norm for all speakers but only those of the elite class, an important point to which we return momentarily.

To meet the needs of modernity, it was clear to the planners that the national language must also be properly[13] codified, or standardized. The first use of *hyōjungo* 'standard language' to point to a future national language appeared as a translation equivalent for the English term 'standard language' in linguist

[12] Indeed, it is not until very late – the 1960s, in fact – that we find any replicable study of mutual dialect intelligibility (Yamagiwa 1967), and even that study is based on respondents' self-reports of how easy they found it to comprehend other dialects than their own.

[13] Properly, that is, to the Western gaze.

Okakura Yoshisaburō's (1868–1936) *Nihongogaku Ippan* 'Outline of Japanese Linguistics' in 1890. Okakura argued, on sociopolitical grounds, that a standard language was necessary and that in the case of Japan, it was the Tōkyō dialect that was the obvious choice (Koyama 2003: 864). He also argued that this Tōkyō dialect-based standard language should replace other dialects. But it is Ueda Kazutoshi (1867–1937) who is perhaps the most famous figure known for the promotion of a *hyōjungo*.

Ueda, already inclined toward the one-nation, one-language monolingual (or, in the case of Japan, mono-dialectal) dominant ideology of the time, was sent to Germany to further his linguistic studies. His stay coincided with the end of the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871), when Germany itself was going through a period of dynamic language standardization and the active eradication of French and Romance language-derived forms from German in favor of "native" neologisms. After this experience, he was even more convinced of the importance of language in creating a *national* consciousness, that Herderian pillar of monolingual language ideology that Bauman and Briggs (2003) have argued is so closely intertwined with modernity. In Japan, the rising nationalistic fervor triggered by victory in the Sino-Japanese War lent weight to Ueda's conviction that a modern Japan required the same kind of standard national language that European nations were known to have.

Ueda asserted that despite the very real need for such a normative language, most speakers simply didn't appreciate the urgency; accordingly, he argued that the government should take the initiative in this critical matter. It should institutionalize a standard variety based on the speech of Tōkyō middle-class elites and begin work immediately on developing it to fit modern needs. Further, to ensure that the national language was adequately absorbed by the citizenry, the government should require the use of this newly developed form in the schools (Koyama 2003: 862). Ueda's ideas were accepted by government officials, and in 1902, the *Kokugo Chōsa I'inkai* 'National Language Investigative Committee'[14] was established and charged, along with issues of script reform and bringing the written language into line with the spoken language, with investigating the dialects and fixing upon a standard language (Carroll 2001: 41; see also Lee 1996, Yasuda 1999, 2007). This committee represents the beginning of official government oversight of language planning and policy, and it is to their work that we next turn.

It is important to stress the question of what were or were not the moral panics (Cameron 1995) underlying the policies that were explicitly articulated by these agencies. These were, as it turned out, centered not around class, nor

[14] Which replaced the *Kokugo Chōsakai* 'National Language Investigative Board' established within the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture in 1899.