Introduction
The Japanese Language before Kokugo: Views of Mori Arinori and Baba Tatsui

I-1. Mori Arinori’s View of the Japanese Language

In debates about kokugo and its merits as the national language in post-Meiji Japan, one person never fails to be mentioned: Mori Arinori, the first minister of education for the Meiji government. He is remembered, however, not as a model devotee of kokugo, but as an unpardonable traitor to the nation’s language.

When he was the chargé d'affaires for the United States, Mori proposed what was afterwards called “the abolition of the Japanese language” and “the adoption of English.” He did so in the introduction to his book (written in English) Education in Japan (1873; Meiji 6), and also in a letter of May 21, 1872 (Meiji 5), to William Dwight Whitney, a distinguished linguist at Yale University. These writings never gained any support and became the target of criticism by scholars after his time: they either laughed at his proposal as an absurdity or attacked it as an outrageous opinion. However, these attacks and ridicule did not necessarily reflect an accurate understanding of Mori’s assertions, as seen in the following passages:

When he was the chargé d'affaires for the United States in early Meiji, Mori Arinori asserted that the Japanese language had too many defects to meet educational needs, and he sought the advice of Western scholars regarding his idea to abolish kokugo completely and to adopt English as kokugo instead. On hearing this, the scholars reacted negatively. For example, Whitney warned him that such a wild scheme would endanger the nation’s foundation; some scholars, such as Sayce,¹ were scornful of such an audacious proposal, and others ignored it and did not respond. (Yamada 1935, 298; emphasis mine)

Scholars of classics in the Edo era, while adoring the elegant classical language, despised the spoken language of their time as the vulgar language of the common people. Similarly, people in Meiji lamented the chaos of their own language and
script. . . Some people worshipped Western languages and alphabets, and they dreamed of replacing kokugo with one of them. Takada Sanae and Tsubouchi Shōyō were among those people, but Mori Arinori’s proposal for abandoning kokugo was the most famous. (Tokieda [1940] 1966, 157)

In a well-known episode, Whitney, an American linguist, reprimanded Mori Arinori for proposing to abolish the Japanese language and to replace it with English. It seems that Mori was not the only one in early Meiji who had such an idea. (Tokieda 1962, 40)

In early Meiji, Viscount Mori Arinori, who would later become the minister of education, was troubled by the extreme complexity and irregularity of the Japanese language. He was very concerned about the severe inadequacy of the language for effective education of the people, and was of the opinion that the use of English in education would be more advisable. (Hoshina 1936b, 11)

Among the scholars who encountered the superior civilizations of the West, there were some whose worship of the West went so far as to advocate the reform of kokugo by replacing it with a Western language. This phenomenon during the Meiji Restoration was the same as the phenomenon in the past when the Japanese quickly adopted into their official writings the language and characters of China together with its civilization. The phenomenon in Meiji is represented by the proposal for “the adoption of English” by Mori Arinori in Meiji 5, who was at that time chargé d’affaires for the United States. (Hirai 1948, 173)

Many of the thinkers and intellectuals of that time believed that Western civilization was the ultimate civilization, and that Japan’s progress depended on her adaptation to it. Such belief drew them to Western phonetic alphabets and even led them to advocate the adoption of a Western language to reform kokugo. For example, in June of Meiji 5, Mori Arinori, chargé d’affaires for the United States and later the minister of education, sent W. D. Whitney, professor of linguistics at Yale University, a proposal to reconstitute the Japanese language (nihongo) by replacing kanbun, Chinese writing, with English. (Ōno 1983, 19; emphasis mine)

We must notice, however, something subtle and strange in these condemnations of Mori’s proposals. Their lines of argument, which lack an accurate understanding of Mori’s true intentions, conceal a fact that explains the Japanese people’s sense of their language. First of all, each critic has different and ambiguous descriptions of Mori’s intention. For example, Yamada Yoshio states that Mori wished to “abolish kokugo completely and adopt English as kokugo.”
This sentence is puzzling. The only way to understand this sentence is to interpret the first *kokugo* as the actual Japanese language and the second *kokugo* as the “national language” or the “official language.” Such an ambiguity shows that Yamada was very careless in his use of the word *kokugo.* Ōno’s explanation is similarly ambiguous: to understand his words “reconstitute the Japanese language, *nihongo,* by replacing *kanbun* with English,” we have to interpret “the Japanese language” not as the proper name of a language but as a common noun meaning “the language used in Japan.”

I have no intention of quibbling with their words. I simply want to draw attention to the fact that no scholars after Mori’s time accurately understood his contention because the people’s sense of language in Mori’s time was substantially different from that which was formed after Meiji. The concepts of *nihongo* and *kokugo,* though clearly defined today, were hardly discernible, as in a haze, within Mori’s sense of language.

This subtle but important shift dropped out of scholars’ concerns in the discussions about Mori. For them, Tokieda’s sensational and sweeping summary was sufficient: Mori proposed to abolish the Japanese language and to replace it with English, but such an idea was rebuked by linguist Whitney. Without any further examination, this episode started to gain its own plausibility.

What, then, did Mori really mean to say? Let us first read the beginning of his famous letter to Whitney:²

> The spoken language of Japan being inadequate to the growing necessities of the people of that Empire, and too poor to be made, by a phonetic alphabet, sufficiently useful as a written language, the idea prevails among us that, if we would keep pace with the age, we must adopt a copious and expanding European language. (Mori 1872, 310)

Mori did say that it was inevitable for the Japanese as a “commercial nation” to adopt English “in view of our rapidly increasing intercourse with the world at large” (ibid.). However, he never mentioned abolishing the Japanese language. He continued:

> All the schools the Empire has had, for many centuries, have been Chinese; and, strange to state, we have had no schools or books in our own language for educational purposes. . . . Schools for the Japanese language are found to be greatly needed, and yet there are neither teachers nor books for them. The only course to be taken, to secure the desired end, is to start anew, by first turning the spoken language into a properly written form, based on a pure phonetic principle. (309–310)
Mori certainly advocated an “introduction of the English language into the Japanese Empire” (310), but it is an agenda at a completely different level from “the abolition of the Japanese language.” He simply urged the need for English as what he called “commercial language.” At the same time, Mori was calling for an institutionalization of teaching methods in Japanese, reforming the traditional kanbun-based method, even suggesting a romanization of the language. This proposal also is far from “the abolition of the Japanese language.” If there is a comment of that sort in his writing, it is not in his letter to Whitney but rather in his introduction to Education in Japan. As pointed out by Ivan Hall, one of the commentators in Mori Arinori zenshū (Complete Works of Mori Arinori), in these two writings there is a subtle difference in Mori’s idea about the treatment of the Japanese language (Hall 1972b, 94).

Mori’s opinion about English, on the other hand, was consistent. His proposal for adopting English was motivated by extremely practical concerns. Mori wrote to Whitney that “if we do not adopt a language like that of the English, which is quite predominant in Asia, as well as elsewhere in the commercial world, the progress of Japanese civilization is evidently impossible” (Mori 1872, 301). He even went on to say in his introduction to Education in Japan that for Japan to obtain “the commercial power of the English-speaking race” was “a requisite of the maintenance of our independence in the community of nations as a commercial race.” Such extreme rationalism by no means meant that Mori was a submissive worshipper of the English language. He alluded to “the absence of law, rule or order, based either on etymology or sound, in its orthography, and to the large number of irregular verbs,” which would make it difficult “to introduce English into Japan.” This led him to “propose to banish from the English language, for the use of the Japanese nation, all or most of the exceptions” (308). He suggested, for example, eliminating irregular conjugations such as “saw/seen” and “spoke/spoken,” replacing them with “seed” and “spaked,” respectively. He also suggested making the English spelling system consistent with pronunciation, such as “tho” instead of “though” and “bow” instead of “bough.” This was Mori’s theory of simplified English, which Hall explains as follows: “The content [of Mori’s letter to Whitney] is almost a proposal to abolish English, rather than Japanese: Mori spends six out of the eight pages of the letter attacking English, not Japanese” (Hall 1972b, 94). The major bone of contention between Mori and Whitney was indeed English—that is, Mori’s proposal of simplified English.

In response to Mori, Whitney maintained that Japan must adopt English as it was if Japan wished to absorb Western civilization. “Simplified English” would instead become “a barrier between the Japanese and English speaker of English” (Whitney 1872, 416). Whitney did say that education in the Japanese
language, “the native language,” was the indispensable element in Japan's social and cultural development. However, he also suggested that it would be necessary to romanize Japanese and “to open the language, as rapidly as circumstances allow, to enrichment from the stores of English” (422). Furthermore, he advised Mori to “let it [English] take in Japan the place so long occupied by the Chinese; let it become the learned tongue and the classical language” (421). That is, Whitney suggested the establishment of a *diglossia* of English and Japanese replacing that of *kanbun* and Japanese. As Hall pointed out, such a status for English corresponds to that of Latin in the Middle Ages or English in British colonies (Hall 1972a, 26). In sum, the episode of Whitney reprimanding Mori was mere gossip among intellectuals that disregarded the actual content of the exchange between Whitney and Mori.

Mori and Whitney had the same view about the influence of the Chinese language on Japanese. Whitney's opinion that “the influence of the Chinese language on the Japanese has always been a harmful and regrettable one, and that complete emancipation from it would be exceedingly advantageous to Japan” (Whitney 1872, 420) corresponds to Mori's statement in his introduction: “The style of the [Japanese] language is like the Chinese. In all our institutions of learning, the Chinese classics have been used. . . . Without the aid of the Chinese, our language has never been taught or used for any purpose of communication. This shows its poverty” (Mori 1873, 265–266). By “poverty,” Mori did not mean only the limited geographical range where the Japanese language was used, but that Japanese could not be an autonomous language as long as it was dominated by “Chinese,” that is, by Chinese characters (*kanji*), words (*kango*), and sentences (*kanbun*). Here we can see that Mori was not a wild dreamer but one who had already zeroed in on the core of future problems in the Japanese language and writing system, *kokugo kokuji mondai*. By adopting simplified English, Mori wanted to expel from the Japanese language Chinese elements, which were the major hindrance to Japan's modernization, and ultimately to eliminate the Japanese language entirely because it was “a weak and uncertain medium of communication” (266).

However, did Mori actually advocate the “abolition of the Japanese language”? As seen above, he wrote not a single word about it in his letter to Whitney. It was only in the following passage in the introduction of his *Education in Japan* that Mori mentioned anything related to an abolition of the language:

*The march of modern civilization in Japan has already reached the heart of the nation—the English language following it suppresses the use of both Japanese and Chinese. . . . Under the circumstances, our meagre language, which can never be of any use outside of our islands, is doomed to yield to the domination*
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of the English tongue, especially when the power of steam and electricity shall have pervaded the land. Our intelligent race, eager in the pursuit of knowledge, cannot depend upon a weak and uncertain medium of communication in its endeavor to grasp the principal truths from the precious treasury of Western science and art and religion. The laws of state can never be preserved in the language of Japan. All reasons suggest its disuse. (266)

Here we must pay attention to the end of the passage above: Mori said “the language of Japan” and not “Japanese.” In fact, in the beginning he said that English “suppresses the use of both Japanese and Chinese.” It was not, of course, that he was worried about the fate of China, but that he was intensely concerned about Japan. He firmly believed that “the language of Japan” consisted of a disorderly mixture of Japanese and Chinese. In other words, for Mori, Japanese, nihongo, was not the same as “the language of Japan.”

Though Mori’s “proposal for the abolition of the Japanese language” has often been discussed, what should be of importance is not the rights and wrongs of “abolition,” but rather the definition of the concept of nihongo, the Japanese language. Hall’s comment is full of suggestions in this regard: “In both Mori’s and his opponents’ writings on problems in kokugo, the words ‘Japanese’ and ‘Chinese’ [languages] appear frequently, but their meanings are rather complex. The readers must carefully think what they mean each time they are used” (Hall 1972b, 95).

For example, the word “Japanese” in “the English language . . . suppresses the use of both Japanese and Chinese” in the above comment from Mori should be understood as yamato kotoba, which is free from elements of Chinese words or styles. The word “Chinese” should be understood as kanji (Chinese characters), kango (Chinese words), and kanbun (Chinese phrases and sentences) used in Japan. The concept of “Japanese” (nihongo) may be self-evident for us today, but it was not at all clear for Mori Arinori. The most serious problem in “the language of Japan” for Mori was the hopeless distance between the spoken and written languages. In his letter to Whitney, Mori wrote of “the spoken language of Japan being inadequate to the growing necessities of the people of that Empire, and too poor to be made, by a phonetic alphabet, sufficiently useful as a written language” (Mori 1872, 310). Furthermore, “the written language now in use in Japan, has little or no relation to the spoken language, but is mainly hieroglyphie—a deranged Chinese, blended in Japanese, all the letters of which are themselves of Chinese origin” (309).

In Japan at that time, the state of the language, “the language of Japan,” could not possibly have been a single, uniform “Japanese.” It was impossible for Mori to envision a unified “Japanese” to overcome such a linguistic split. This is the
very point that later scholars missed in their critiques of Mori: their criticisms (except for Baba Tatsui’s, discussed in the next section) were based on a view of “Japanese” that was already established in their time as kokugo, “the national language of Japan.” For those outraged at Mori’s intention to “abolish Japanese,” “Japanese” was already in an unshakable position, while “the language of Japan” for Mori was still a floating concept. Furthermore, though “Japanese” later took more obvious shape as “the national language of Japan,” it was like a collage of blurred pictures in Mori’s time. Mori was not yet able to place the linguistic unity of “Japanese” on the same level as the political unity of the “Japanese Empire.”

To recapitulate, though the belief that “the Japanese language” is an unmistakable unity is dominant today, such a belief was itself a construction of modern history. Mori Arinori’s argument sheds light on the hidden history of the ideology of language in modern Japan.

The identification of nihongo, the Japanese language, as kokugo, the national language of Japan, became implicit in linguistic consciousness in modern Japan, and at the same time became the ideological goal to which this modern linguistic consciousness was directed. It was also the unquestionable moral and ethical imperative that the Japanese language be identified as “the national language of Japan.” Mori’s argument, however, completely lacked such a moral recognition, and this naturally irritated scholars. Although scholars conflicted with each other in their views about kokugo kokuji mondai, the issues about national language and script, all considered Mori the common enemy. There were conservatives, such as Yamada and Tokieda, who protected rekishiteki kanazukai, the traditional phonetic use of kana, and bungo, the traditional written language, and there were reformers, such as Hoshina and Hirai, who promoted romanization and genbun itchi, the unification of written and spoken languages. But they were all critical of Mori Arinori because Mori’s linguistic consciousness was antagonistic and alien to that of late-Meiji intellectuals and because he was an immoral traitor to the Japanese language. This difference in their linguistic consciousness explains why the scholars’ criticisms against Mori are colored by their irritation at the incomprehensible and by their outrage against a dangerous view that might corrupt “good” social morale.

Moreover, Mori exposed what they did not want to discuss regarding the linguistic consciousness of modern Japan: Mori boldly defined Japanese as “our meagre language, which can never be of any use outside of our islands.” Even while putting up a calm front, the intellectuals in Japan were always haunted by this undeniable fact, which took root among them as a “habit of pessimism towards the mother tongue,” as Tanaka Katsuhiko points out (1989, 14–16), or the “Japanese people’s subconscious curse against their own language,” as
Suzuki Takao puts it (1989, 15). However, such pessimism was supposed to be an unmentionable. Intellectuals have always reacted neurotically against Mori’s argument, fearing that it might contain “undesirable truth.” After Mori, Japan searched agonizingly for ways to cure its sick linguistic consciousness, or to forcefully deny it. It is possible to suspect that the later scheme for the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere was partially motivated by the phantom depicted by Mori Arinori.4

**I-2. Baba Tatsui’s Criticism of Mori Arinori**

Mori’s argument did not elicit instant reactions in Japan, probably because it was written in English and published abroad. Only Baba Tatsui, who was also abroad, gave an immediate response to it in a series of harsh criticisms. Baba, who later became famous as a prominent warrior in the Liberal Rights Movement, was then a student of law in London.

Baba’s criticism was the most thorough, though it only concerned Mori’s opinion in his introduction to *Education in Japan*; it did not include in its scope Mori’s letter to Whitney in which Mori argued for a simplified English. In contrast to the emotional reactions to Mori from later scholars, Baba attempted to invalidate Mori’s perception that Japanese was an insufficient language. Baba did this through elaborate and laborious intellectual work resulting in 1873 in a complete book in English of Japanese grammar—*An Elementary Grammar of the Japanese Language*. Commonly known in Japan as *Nihongo bunten*, it was the first book that systematically described Japanese grammar. Mori Arinori, unintentionally, thus triggered the production of the first grammar book of the Japanese spoken language.

In the introduction to the book, Baba unfolded succinct and pointed criticisms of Mori with the following two purposes: to refute Mori’s allegation that Japanese was a meager language and no match for English and to caution against the social inequity that would very likely occur if English became the only official language. As shown in the last section, Mori pointed out that the “poverty” of Japanese was evident in that it could not be used for education or modern communication without depending on Chinese words and sentences. Baba’s response to this was as follows:

> Before the introduction of Chinese, we must have had some sort of language, which served as a means of communication. Since we introduced the Chinese classics, literature, &c., we have been obliged to use Chinese words or phrases which we could not express in Japanese, and so it became necessary to teach our language with the aid of Chinese. This is generally the case when one nation
introduces the classical literature of another country: because there are always many words in the latter, for which the language of the former cannot find synonyms or equivalents. (Baba 1873, 7–8)\(^5\)

Baba argued that each language community with different cultural customs forms different concepts, which sometimes cannot be exactly translated into other languages. Such untranslatable words are commonly adopted as loan words not only in Japanese but also in other languages. For example, that the English translation of Roman laws contains many Latin words “does not show the poverty of the English language, but only the difference in their ideas and customs,” and therefore, Baba asserted, “the fact that one language is taught with the aid of another, does not prove its poverty” (9). Thus, Baba was far more optimistic than Mori about the Chinese influence on Japanese. However, his point was not to protect the position of Chinese in Japanese, but to criticize Mori’s conclusion that Japanese was an inadequate language because of its prevailing use of Chinese characters and words. For that purpose, Baba illustrated the relationship between Chinese and Japanese as being parallel to the relationship between Latin and modern Western languages, especially English, which Mori believed in. I must note here that Baba’s argument is substantially different from those in the debate about national script in post-Meiji that defended the position of Chinese as the classic language of the East, equating its status to that of Latin in the West.

It was not that Baba tried to depict the Japanese of his time as a perfect language. His view came from a certain healthy relativism: Every language has strong and weak characteristics; this is also true for English, which Mori insisted should be adopted: “There are perfections and imperfections in both languages.” It was only because of a difference in customs and ways of thinking that Japanese might lack equivalents for some English words, but it was not an indication of the unequivocal superiority of English to Japanese (10). Baba even said that Japanese surpasses English in the regularity of its writing and pronunciation systems. (Note that Mori also made the same criticism of English, but Baba did not know that.) However, regardless of their shortcomings, there cannot be any superiority or inferiority between the two languages since each has “words which serve as signs of ideas for the help of memory” (11).\(^6\)

With Nihongo bunten, Baba attempted to prove that “certain rules are observed throughout every part of [Japanese] speech; there are eight parts of speech, their subdivisions, tenses, moods or voices of verbs, rules of syntax, and so on.” He claimed that Japanese was “sufficiently perfect to teach the elements of common education so far as grammar itself is concerned” (9–10). Baba had a sociolinguistic insight: describing the grammar substantiates the
language and best represents the autonomy of the speech community of that language. Moreover, Baba perceived political and social implications in Mori’s proposal, which he refuted as follows: there were indeed cases in which people of a nation came to speak another’s language, but such cases were a result of the enforcement of the language by a conqueror, not a result of the willingness of the conquered to change language; in this respect, Mori’s argument failed in its premise. Mori’s attempt to replace the language of one nation was fundamentally unrealistic and unreasonable because “even when one nation was forced to introduce a language by the superior power of the conqueror, the former did not give up their native tongue which they had been accustomed to speak for hundreds of years, and which was consequently most convenient to them” (13).

Baba cautioned that such a forced bilingual system would without doubt bring tragedy to the people; it would create social class divisions based on language:

*Naturally the wealthier classes of people can be free from the daily occupation to which the poorer classes are constantly subjected, and consequently the former can devote more time for learning the language than the latter. If affairs of state, and all affairs of social intercourse are to be transacted through the English language, the lower classes will be shut out from the important questions which concern the whole nation, just as the Patricians in Rome excluded the plebs from *jus sacrum*, Comitia, &c.; the consequence being that there will be an entire separation between the higher class and the lower, and no common sympathies between them; and thus they will be prevented from acting as one, and so the advantages of unity will be entirely lost. These evils appear to be felt in India. . . . These evils will necessarily exist, unless some means are employed to establish the universal instruction of a people through their own language.* (13–14)

Whitney, also, pointed out, in commenting on Mori’s idea, that the adoption of English might create social distance between a handful of intellectuals and the majority of the people. Nonetheless, he merely pointed out the case of Latin in the Middle Ages as an example of linguistic separation, and contradicted himself in advising Mori to adopt English as “the learned tongue and the classical language” (Whitney 1872, 421). In contrast to Whitney, Baba referred to the political and social problems caused by the enforcement of English and the resulting bilingualism in India, and also in Wales, Ireland, and Scotland, whose Gaelic languages were invaded by English from England. Here, Baba had a more keen and realistic understanding of problems of linguistic hegemony in colonies than the English speaker Whitney.
Insights such as Baba’s cannot be found in any of the other critics of Mori; they raised their voices to accuse Mori of slighting the tradition of kokugo and of blindly worshipping the West. Baba neither indulged himself in fanatic linguistic chauvinism nor did he charge Mori with destroying tradition as a follower of the West. The basis of Baba’s assertion was his resistance to the use of language for controlling society and his hope of linguistic democracy that would support political democracy. As Hagiwara Nobutoshi keenly pointed out, “for Mori, international advantage was the priority, while for Baba, domestic impact was the concern. This debate over the good and evil of adopting English accidentally revealed the choice in Japan’s modernization: national authority or civil rights, as seen later in the heated contest between the hanbatsu seifu, the government dominated by elites from previously powerful fiefs, and the civil rights movement” (Hagiwara 1967, 42–43).

The debate between Mori and Baba was an earnest dialogue and discussion, which later scholars failed to understand: as represented by Yamada Yosio, they appreciated Baba only in their own convenient terms. Yamada’s Kokugogakushi yō (Concise History of Kokugogaku; 1935) is the most representative work and is often cited as the classic commendation of Baba in discussions of Baba’s epoch-making contribution in Nihongo bunten (39). Bunten was no doubt “the first systematic study of overall grammar of spoken Japanese” and “an important masterpiece in the history of kokugo” (299). However, we must not overlook Yamada’s hidden intention behind his praise of Baba as “the great protector of kokugo” (300), an intention distinct from the wish to engage in a genuine academic evaluation.

As will be further discussed in a later chapter, Yamada believed that the true tradition of kokugo Breathes in the classical written language of the past, and not in the current spoken language. It was from this neotraditionalism that he supported the historical use of kana (rekishiteki kanazukai) and fervently objected to the restrictions on the use of kanji. Furthermore, Yamada made a tight connection between the “unbroken line of special national polity” (bansei ikkei no kokutai) and the sacred tradition of “kokugo.” For Yamada, the reform of kokugo was an unforgivable plot that would lead directly to a change of kokutai. As a part of his protest against the reformers who advocated the phonetic use of kana (hyōonshiki kanazukai) and the restrictions on kanji, Yamada first defined Mori as their forerunner, who had slighted “kokugo.” Then Yamada used Baba to strengthen his own camp in opposition to Mori.

Baba’s organization of Japanese grammar actually followed that of English grammar. For example, a verb has present, past, and future tenses, and conjugates in agreement with the person and number of its subject. Though Yamada intensely detested the measuring of Japanese against the grammar of
Western languages, he nonetheless applauded Baba for being a “great protector of kokugo,” only because Baba was critical of Mori.

Though Yamada used Baba as a model patriot of the Japanese language, it was not Baba’s central concern that the adoption of English might ruin the tradition of kokugo. Baba’s fear was that the adoption of English would potentially alienate a majority of the people from education and that education would become accessible only for a handful of elites who could use English. We do not find here any indication that Baba intended to protect the sacred tradition of kokugo. Rather, we are convinced that Baba would be, if he were alive, harshly critical of Yamada’s ideology of language, which denies linguistic democracy.

I-3. Baba Tatsui’s Linguistic Void

Japanese grammar in Baba’s time was discussed only in terms of the written language of the past. In contrast, Baba attempted to show the systematic rules of “the Japanese language as it is spoken.” His book Nihongo bunten was a brave and intuitive attempt at descriptivism, which gained public acceptance in modern linguistics only after his time. Though the sentences he used in the book, such as below, are natural for us today, we must understand that it took Baba much academic courage and commitment to write about such an actual spoken language:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Watakushi} & \text{ [sic] } \text{ wa ikimasu.} \\
\text{Watakusi wa ikimasita.} \\
\text{Watakusi wa ikimasho.} \quad \text{(Baba 1873, 28)}
\end{align*}
\]

While his criticism of Mori was credible, Baba’s linguistic practice itself was far from the picture of Japanese he drew in Nihongo bunten: Baba never used “Japanese as it is spoken” in his own writings. In fact, all of his writings are in English. The few essays in Japanese are lecture notes, all taken by other people. The books and articles he wrote while studying in London and while he was taking refuge in the United States are all written in English. Even his autobiography, which he started right before he fled to the United States, was written in English, together with most of the diary he wrote in London and even in Japan. Baba was well known among civil rights activists as an exceptionally outstanding and eloquent speaker. Therefore, it is shocking to learn, as Hagiwara pointed out, that “Baba spoke in Japanese but never wrote in Japanese. He used English in his writing” (Hagiwara 1967, 94). Hagiwara explained that one of the reasons for Baba’s preference for English was his intellectual background in English studies (eigaku); another might be that, unlike other
Japanese intellectuals at that time, he had never equipped himself for Chinese studies (kangaku).

This reminds us of Mori’s argument that the dominant use of Chinese (kanbun) signified the “poverty of Japanese.” This touched a raw nerve with Baba, and, ironically, his linguistic practice proved Mori was right. On the other hand, Baba’s warning of the future social stratification that would be caused by the implementation of English was an apt description of the state of contemporary Japan, where he lived, linguistically dominated by kanbun. It can be posited that Baba’s exclusion from the world of written Japanese was a result of his never acquiring the Chinese writing style. Baba criticized Mori’s idea of adopting English, but he was only able to express criticism in English: indeed, this paradox was symbolic of the linguistic context of Japan at that time. Neither Mori nor Baba was able to stand firm on the foundation of “the Japanese language.” More precisely, no firm foundation of the Japanese language existed at that time. Only those who were privileged enough to afford time for studying a language monopolized the kanbun kundoku tai (kanbun-style Japanese), as representative of their class status.

To emancipate the Japanese language from the hegemony of kanbun style, genbun itchi, the unification of the spoken and written languages, would have been imperative. However, the realization of such an ideal required a reckless and daring linguistic crusade against the tenacity of kanbun tradition, which is beyond the imagination of us today. For example, Futabatei Shimei, famous for his demonstration of genbun itchi in his novel Ukigumo (Floating Clouds), had to write first in Russian to express freely what he had difficulty writing in Japanese, and then translate it back into spoken Japanese. For Baba, the spoken Japanese he illustrated in Nihongo bunten was hopelessly separated from kanbun style, the official written language. The only solution he found to overcome this linguistic gap was, alas, English, a foreign language. Such was the limitation of the Japanese language, not only for Baba, but also for those in early Meiji in general.

Facing the unresolved state of the Japanese language in early Meiji, Mori and Baba each developed a theory: Mori concluded that the Japanese language was not unified enough to support the modern nation, and he proposed as a remedy adopting English as a national language; Baba refuted Mori, warning that the adoption of English would destroy the unity of the Japanese people. Still, even Baba was not able to overcome the barrier that Mori had pointed out between spoken Japanese and written Japanese. Kokugo could have been realized only by coming to terms with this predicament. Or, we should say, kokugo was created precisely because of the need to resolve this predicament. In other words, kokugo had a two-track mission: to reconcile the written and spoken
languages through *genbun itchi* and to seek support for the premise of the unity of *kokugo* in the people’s sense of the political nation, in their consciousness of a nation-state nurtured by the ideology of *kokutai*.

The reconciliation between the written and spoken languages was a definite requirement as long as *kokugo* was to be liberated from a handful of cultural elites and defined as a linguistic unity to account for linguistic expression by all people in the nation. In the case of Japan, however, such an awakening to *kokugo* was achieved by the exaltation of the consciousness of the nation-state, the empire. In the background of this unique establishment of consciousness for *kokugo*, there was a historical tide in the Japanese political climate. There was also an initiative taken by a modern linguist, Ueda Kazutoshi, who, quickly responding to this political climate, introduced the modern scientific theory of language into Japan.

Ueda Kazutoshi is the most important key character for our understanding of the ideology of *kokugo*. Various struggles in early Meiji about the Japanese language informed Ueda’s thinking, which ultimately led to his giving concrete direction to the course that the language was to take as *kokugo*. I will further discuss Ueda’s ideas in part 2, but I will first trace the development of two major problems of the language in part 1: issues of *kokuji* (national script) and *genbun itchi* (unification of spoken and written languages). I will also delineate ideas of *kokugo* before Ueda Kazutoshi.