

New Perspectives on “Dialect Literature” in Aomori Prefecture

青森県における「方言文学」の定義改善へ

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Abstract

This paper provides a brief overview of “dialect literature” [*hōgen bungaku*], broadly defined, in Aomori prefecture. It contributes to the conventional narratives on the topic by expanding the scope to include non-traditional literary activities. More concretely: while literary historians of Aomori tend to focus on the small cohort of Shōwa-period establishment writers [*bundan*] led by Fukushi Kōjirō, I consider aspects of the educational life-writing movement inspired by Fukushi along with more recent popular/amateur writers and performers—Yoshi Ikuzō, Ina Kappei, Shibutani Hakuryū, etc.—to be components of the field of “dialect literature” and worthy of academic attention. By expanding the definition of “dialect literature” in this way, we can open the field up to a broader understanding of both the inheritances of Fukushi’s philosophy and the appropriation of the identity of “Tsugaru” beyond it. By expanding the perspective on dialect literature, this essay establishes the groundwork for a well-rounded liberal arts education in the local literature of the Tsugaru region.

Keywords: dialect, literature, local, vernacular, poetry

1. Introduction

Aomori Prefecture is well known as the birthplace of writers like Dazai Osamu, Terayama Shūji, and Ishizaka Yōjirō, and their contribution to the field of modern Japanese language literature—particularly in the spheres of wartime, avant-garde, and popular literature—is indisputable. However, a full accounting of the prefecture’s literary contributions and comprehensive approach to the topic of its “local culture” must also include the vernacular literature movement, which was spearheaded by Fukushi Kōjirō and subsequently sustained by a small cohort of writers throughout the bulk of the Showa Period and beyond. While the movement did not usher in the national aesthetic and political revolution its founder envisioned, it did deeply mark the history of the Tsugaru literary establishment.

While the use of “dialect” [*hōgen*] in Japanese-language literature dates back at least to the Tokugawa period, when it was deployed in dialogue in popular literature as a means of differentiating between characters of different class and region [*katagi*], no scholarship has indicated its use as a literary medium or genre until the Shōwa period. The first poet to consciously adapt provincial vernacular language as a fundamental mode of literary expression was Fukushi Kōjirō in 1926. His small cohort of students began writing “dialect poetry” (as well as “dialect prose,” to

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a limited extent) primarily during the interwar and postwar periods. His work, and that of his students, has been documented by a number of scholars (Sakaguchi, 2007; Seidō, 1984; Fujita, 1977–1980).

Fukushi's writings about regionalism and vernacular language were picked up in local pedagogy circles, specifically by educators involved in the *seikatsu tsuzurikata* life-writing movement, sparking a debate over its merits as a pedagogical tool. While both Fukushi and *seikatsu tsuzurikata* practitioners have been the topic of previous scholarship, they have yet to be contextualized within a single lineage. Extant scholarship on dialect literature in Japan by academics like Sakaguchi Masaaki, Seidō Rokuro, and Fujita Tatsuo has traditionally focused on so-called “pure literature” [*junbungaku*] and not dealt at all with the education movement. Neither has it generally viewed its literary object as contiguous with more contemporary vernacular literary productions, such as commercial artists like comic artist Ina Kappei or vocalist Yoshi Ikuzō. Likewise, a comprehensive consideration of literary uses of dialect in Aomori might also be expanded to include oral storytelling and folktales, such as those preserved and practiced by the contemporary group of hobbyists known as Wa no Mukashi-ko.

The purpose of this paper is therefore to organize the background of the Japanese dialect literature movement into a basic historical timeline and to purposefully recontextualize some of these literary forms with their semi-adjacent kin, contributing to a more holistic understanding of the conscious and performative deployment of vernacular speech as a literary medium. The impetus behind this move is to widen the scope of inquiry throughout the literary field, as described in Bourdieu's (1977) classic work. The purpose of spacializing literature and its agent-producers within a field is to allow for recognition of what he calls “autonomous” (literary) and “heteronomous” (non-literary) forces that give shape to the field, affecting the literary disposition or “habitus” of the writers. Focusing only on the aesthetic or “pure-literature” end of the field, as previous scholars have, results in a lacuna encompassing pure literature's amateur and popular cousins. Such a recontextualization is also pedagogically useful, as it highlights the contiguities between historical texts and contemporary culture as well as takes steps towards a post-philological, interdisciplinary approach to the study of local literature (via connections to historical pedagogy and politics, ethnomusicology, ethnography, etc.). This has the effect of increasing the relevance of dialect literature texts for students who find historical examples less relatable or those undergoing a well-rounded liberal arts education. This research, uniquely presented in English, thereby acts as a foundation for an English and Japanese bilingual liberal arts “local studies course” [*rōkaru kamoku*] currently in development incorporating a wide range of vernacular language texts.

2. Background

Any discussion of the “dialect poetry movement” [*hōgen shi undō*] must first acknowledge the appropriation of the term *hōgen* by its practitioners. This word is a portmanteau of the words *chihō* and *genjo*, literally denominating “provincial language.” Like the English word “dialect,” this term provincializes vernacular language and subverts it below the presumed natural or authentic version of the language—a grapholect or state language, contemporarily called *hyōjungo* or “standardized language,” presumably exercised most widely in the political center of the nation. Indeed, *hyōjungo* was originally developed from samurai-class spoken vernacular from the pre-modern capital region of Edo. While it is not my intention to reify the hierarchy implicit in the term “dialect,” I intentionally deploy it here interchangeably with “vernacular language” as I feel this best reflects the dialect literati's own reappropriation and use of the term. Fukushi himself originally avoided the word *hōgen* in favor of the synonymous neologism *chihōgo*, but neither he nor his students continued the practice in a significant way.¹

¹ For additional context, see, e.g. the notes appended to Fukushi's inaugural dialect poem experiment, “*Jaigo no yopparai onago*.” Fukushi, 1967, vol. 1, 154–5.

We can see him grapple with these specific terms early in the movement. In the introduction to Takagi Kyōzō’s *Hōgen shishū: Marumero* [Poems in Dialect: Marmello], the first major publication of “dialect poetry,” Fukushi alludes to his view of the relationship between different linguistic modes of Japanese:

Throughout the world, every nation’s people has two native languages [*kokugo*]. One is its vernacular [*chihōgo*]; the other is the national shared language [*kokumin kyōyū no gengo*] (mistakenly called standardized language [*hyōjungo*])—in other words, what linguists have recently been hailing as *la langue commune* (*kyōdōgo*) [sic] (Fukushi, 1980, pp. 4).²

The conceptualization of “native language” here runs against the grain of language discourse in Japan at the time. Before the Meiji Restoration and its attendant program of rapid modernization, there was no single unified spoken “Japanese language,” and written language [*bungotai*] was an idiosyncratic property of the educated classes. The first step toward modernizing language in Japan was the *genbun icchi* movement, the roots of which can be found even before the Meiji Restoration, which brought the form of written language much closer to that of spoken Japanese. The state language or standardized language Fukushi mentions—*hyōjungo*—was developed just after the turn of the twentieth century. Thus, when he criticizes *la langue commune*, he is really responding to a distinctly modern phenomenon of consciously cultivating national identity through enforcement of artificial language standards. Thus, his dividing of “native language” (literally “language of the nation”) into vernacular and state language directly subverts his contemporary paradigm of modern nation-ism. And by using dialect or vernacular speech as the primary mode of written discourse, he restores the historical meaning of grapholect (the standardized, written state language), returning it from rule to exception.³

While it may be easy to dismiss Fukushi’s valorization of vernacular speech as a fetishization of the particular or a rejection of global cosmopolitanism, it is critical not to lose sight of the historical and psychological context surrounding the use of dialect in interwar and postwar Japan.

Tanaka Yukari has detailed more than half a decade of evolving views on vernacular language in postwar Japan, culminating in what she frames as a contemporary “prestige” associated with the ability to wield the increasingly esoteric languages. Yet, from the end of WWII through the late 1970s, many viewed the use of or dependence on non-standardized Japanese as a mark of shame. Dialect speakers (who moved to central regions) were bullied, ostracized, or worse. This led to a rash of retaliatory crimes—physical assaults and murders—by people suffering from a so-called “dialect complex” (Tanaka, 2014, pp. 9–11). Because dialect was viewed by the state as an impediment to the early twentieth-century development of Japan as a modern nation-state, non-standardized language was painted as regressive and targeted by the “dialect-eradication movement” [*hōgen bokumetsu undō*] from the turn of the century until as late as the 1950s (Tanaka, 2011, pp. 43). This movement was influenced in part by European language policy, particularly as intellectuals like Yanaihara Tadao idealized French assimilation policy as a model for both the Japanese mainland and its colonies (Yeounsuk, 171–2). One policy of the movement was to enforce the use of “dialect placards” [*hōgen fuda*] or “penalty placards” [*batsu fuda*] in public schools. When pupils were discovered to be speaking in vernacular rather than standardized speech, they would be forced to hang

² The term “*la langue commune*” appears in French in the original.

³ Terayama Shūji, a Tsugaru-native artist active during the postwar period, makes a strikingly similar distinction between *kokugo* and *jibun-go*, describing the former as the language of the state (appropriate for writing about politics and collecting taxes) and the latter as a unique language of the individual compiled from layers of *ken-go* [prefecture language], *machi-go* [village language], and other jargons acquired throughout one’s life. The difference between Terayama and Fukushi is that the former pushes the atomization to the individual level, whereas the latter is invested in maintaining regional language on the level of a community-wide social imaginary. Terayama, 1991, pp. 24.

an incriminating placard around their neck, similar to wearing a dunce cap. This practice originated in Okinawa, where its colonial subjects were being forced to learn an entirely new language, but later spread to Tohoku and elsewhere (Yeounsuk, 2010, pp. 155). Acclaimed popular writer Inoue Hisashi recalls teachers not only enforcing the placards, but also disparaging vernacular speech as “dirty” and “embarrassing” (Inoue & Hirata, 2002, pp. 82).

Fukushi was simultaneously responding to the globalist aspects of modernism as well as nationalist language policy. During the early years of the twentieth century, many intellectuals of all political stripes argued for the importation of western ideas and values—the creation of a cosmopolitan society—in order to improve their nation’s standing on the global stage. Marxian leftists, on the other hand, saw the potential in globalism for uniting the workers of the world. This led to the growth of a group of future-oriented Esperantists throughout the country, notably including Aomori native writer Akita Ujaku. In Fukushi’s eyes, however, cosmopolitanism and Esperanto spelled doom for Japan in the future, not the opposite.

Traditionalism [*dentō shugi*] in Fukushi’s eyes was a pointed critique of the state of the interwar literary class. Traditionalism specifically localized culture within a national paradigm and in direct opposition to the placeless cosmopolitanism and correlated socialism, the *zeitgeist* which had seduced so many of his fellow literati (Fukushi, 1967, Vol. 2, pp. 67). His insistence on the emplacement of individuals within a very literal and specific landscape, and on the insistence upon the importance of cultural difference, formed a fundamental aspect of his critique of the modern mythology of universal logic, communication, and humanism.⁴ Accordingly, cultural and national differences result from generations of historical development – a history which outlines the trajectory of a people’s ever-maturing communal ethos. This spirit is an inheritance of cultural forms from past generations, and acts as the foundation of a “unified” [*tōgō*] sense of tradition and order in the present. Thus, there is a moral imperative: it is incumbent upon each new generation of youth to act as stewards to the spirit of place, lest it degrade and threaten the social order.

These policies and attitudes were all continuations of the modernization paradigm and its focus on national language. Thus, it is clear that when Fukushi began writing about dialect poetry and regionalism in the late 1920s he was striking a clear opposition to prevailing politico-cultural trends. The following outline of Fukushi’s legacy, the “dialect poetry movement,” draws together threads from bibliographic and literary-historical work of scholars like Ono Masafumi, Seido Rokuro, Fujita Tatsuo, Arito Hideaki, and Sakaguchi Masaaki.

3. The Dialect Poetry Movement

Fukushi Kōjirō’s first attempt at realizing his ideal of regional restoration and symbolic return to the provinces came in the form of a vernacular-language prose poem.⁵ The work, penned in 1926, is mostly a first-person monologue from the perspective of a “Topsy Country Housewife”:

“The Topsy Country Housewife” (1926)

How old is your husband, eh? Mine’s twenny six this year...oh don’t laugh at me, eh...isn’t your mothers older sisters man twenny years younger then her, aye? Mines not that much younger, aye. Oh, and its so good, aye! When the snow melts, aye, and its about time to start hanging herring from the roof to dry in the sun and theres a lot of work to do in the rice paddies’n and my husband and I churn the wet earth’n

⁴ Premonitions of this stance might be inferred from his use of the term “*kokugo*,” national (Japanese) language, in his rhythm essays: his discussion of the properties of one national language implies different sets of properties for languages in different contexts. See, e.g. Fukushi, 1967, vol. 1, pp. 365–7.

⁵ For more details, see, e.g. Solomon, 2017, chapter 3; Solomon, 2019.

until noon, and then we sit up on the embankments, aye, we eat rice and have sake in a kettle'n and we have a high old time drinking together! [...] (Translated and cited in Solomon, 2019, pp. 7)

Fukushi was dissatisfied with this work, however, as he had lived too long in the capital and away from his native Tsugaru language to write it authentically. Thus, when he returned to Aomori in 1926, he turned his attention to spreading his philosophy to younger local writers.

Fukushi found his first pupil in Takagi Kyōzō, author of the aforementioned *Marumero*, a junior colleague at the *Aomori Nippo* newspaper.⁶ Takagi had little experience writing poetry before, but eagerly took to his mentor's teachings, creating the following:

“Everyday Life—Wedding Night”

*That's just the wind blowin'
The willow trees murmuring
Don' cry
Don' cry
Who ever heard of a tearful bride?
Are you crying because we haven't any money?
Oh why, why must we be married in such destitution?*

(Pretend we're just playing house)

*Even if we hold our thin bodies close together
It isn't warm at all
Oh, the two of us!
The same as flies stealing the warmth of the sun
[...] (Takagi, 1983–1990, Vol. 1, pp. 323–4. My translation.)*

This poem, written in Tsugaru vernacular, alludes to the conditions of the poet's life and his relationship with his local community (here, represented negatively by the foreboding willow trees). His later vernacular works, appearing first in *Marumero* in 1932 and then in *Yugionago* [*Lady Snow*] in 1976, follow closely to the standard set with this initial work: the subject matter almost exclusively hinges on the poet's relation to place, mediated through his personal experiences or memories. While the geographic setting of the poems (including the titular work “*Marumero*”) is not limited exclusively to the Tsugaru region, Takagi's linguistic style does remain consistent throughout these works (the majority of his literary output, however, was written in standardized Japanese).

While Takagi was Fukushi's first disciple, perhaps his most important student came in the person of Ichinohe Kenzō. Ichinohe has been described as Fukushi's local successor: a poet, critic, and translator; literally a “giant” who “developed” [*kaitaku*] the Tsugaru literary scene (Ichinohe, Ono, & Yamada, 1997, pp. 62). Ichinohe was a somewhat eclectic writer, focusing on vernacular poetry early in his career, but experimenting also with surrealism, prose poetry, a formal style of quatrain called “*ren*,” and with the theorization of internal and external rhythm in poetic language. This latter point was also inherited from Fukushi Kōjirō, who wrote several works on meter and

⁶ For more on Takagi's recollection of their relationship, see: “Fukushi Kōjirō no omoide.” in Takagi, 1983–1990, vol. 3, 88–92.

scansion [*onsū ritsuron*] (Ichinohe, Ono, & Yamada, 1997, pp. 119–45). Perhaps Ichinohe’s best known work of dialect poetry specifically cites the city which formed the center of his local literary community:

“*Shirosagi*”⁷

*No matter where we go,
for us
there’s no place like Shirosagi!
Watched over by Mt. Iwaki,
and spreading out around the castle: this, our quaint city...
[...]
Climb to the fourth floor of the square tower,
and when I did I saw
Shirosagi has so many trees!
From Tobida all the way to the edge of Wattogu
Everywhere you look there are trees...
[...]
In Shigemori, Suntera-matsu
there are aged cedars growing to the sky.
This is the land of my parents, and their parents!
And we are raised up strong by that water,
the water that springs up from the depths of the depths of that land.
(Oh, and water of course means the spring water in Tobida...)*

*No matter where we go,
for us
there’s no place like Shirosagi!* (Ichinohe, et al., 1964, pp. 11–12. My translation.)

Takagi and Ichinohe’s vernacular poetry has been immortalized in the pages of *The Poetry of Tsugaru: A Collection of Dialect Poetry* (now in its fifth printing by the local publisher Tsugaru shobō) alongside that of Ueki Yōsuke. Ueki’s poems are written in a similar vernacular style, and many share the theme of seasons, flora, and place with the others. One example is the following poem:

“*Snow*”

*Snow falls. It falls on the utility poles. It falls on the shop roofs.
It falls too on the glass windows of the guardhouse on the corner. Snow falls.
Snow falls on all things according to plan.*

*When snow falls, I touch my hand to my breast
When snow falls, I touch my hand to my forehead*

⁷ “Shirosagi” is Ichinohe’s vernacular rendering of the city name “Hirosaki.”

Snow falls. It falls on a black mantle. It falls on the leather cover of a pair of winter geta. It falls too on the tassels of a shawl. Snow falls on all manner of people; it never forgets.

[...] (Ichinohe, Ono, & Yamada, 1997, pp. 118. My translation.)

Ueki also organized the short-lived literary magazine *Kagawara* [Fields of Grass], which was named by Ichinohe and published vernacular poetry during the war years. The first several editions of *The Poetry of Tsugaru* contains a section called “The Kagawara Collection,” featuring contributions by six lesser-known poets. Unfortunately, this section has been excised in more recent editions, effectively removing one of the very few female poets of Tsugaru, Kaimai Hayako, from the cannon:

“Warming up by the brazier”

*So much snow
high piled
Wonder what happened
to the pleasure-garden flowers
And the monkeys, too
who ate crackers in summer
Are their cheeks
frostbitten, bleeding?*

[...] (Ichinohe, Ono, & Yamada, 1997, pp. 156–7. My translation.)

Other, more prolific contributors to *Kagawara* like Hihoro Sōta and Koeda Kurō have also been removed from recent editions. The works featured in *The Poetry of Tsugaru* uniformly deal with the standard themes of the vernacular poetry movement: aspects of everyday life, season, and place.

4. *Seikatsu Tsuzurikata*: The Life Writing Movement

While the contributions of Fukushi’s disciples and Ichinohe’s cohort of vernacular-language writers have been recognized in extant scholarship, the ways in which its philosophical and aesthetic currents spread beyond the privileged domain of the local literary establishment [*chihō bundan*] has been treated as a separate issue. However, if discourses surrounding dialect poetry are to be considered theorizations and politicizations of the voice of the Tsugaru people, then it is crucial to widen our gaze to encompass their participation in the sphere of education as well. Indeed, during the height of Fukushi’s fervor for regionalism and dialect poetry in the 1930s, several local adherents to *seikatsu tsuzurikata* pedagogy engaged in a debate over the role of vernacular language and poetry in grammar school education.

The *seikatsu tsuzurikata* [life writing] movement was introduced to Japan in the late 1920s with the goal of promoting the development of pragmatic written language skills.⁸ Whereas *tsuzurikata* was conceived of as fulfilling the requirements of the state in producing moral imperial subjects capable of efficient communication, its practitioners—especially in northern Tōhoku—appropriated the class time for more open-ended endeavors. By emphasizing “life writing,” many educators sought to bring a connection between the (mostly) working-class life of children and their classroom education. As life-writing compositions helped students recognize and articulate

⁸ For details on this movement, see Endo, 2016.

feelings about themselves and their community's social conditions, the *tsuzurikata* movement became associated with the growing proletarian literature movement and revolutionary children's culture. One of the practical results of tasking young students with depicting and discussing their lives was the rise of the use of vernacular language in the classroom.⁹ This movement was paralleled by the famous poet Kitahara Hakushu's encouragement of free verse poetry written by children [*jidō jiyūshi*], providing the conditions for vernacular free verse children's poetry to appear as a pedagogical tool in the classroom.

This development was not greeted uncritically by educators in Tsugaru. Several men engaged in "dialect poetry debates" concerning the role of vernacular language poetry in *tsuzurikata* educational contexts in the pages of "Research in National Language Education" [*Kokugo kyōiku kenkyū*] in 1935 and "Tsuzurikata Curriculum" [*Tsuzurikata kyōtei*] in 1938, following several articles touching on the topic published in "Research in National Language Education" and "Theory of Poetry by Children: Practical Applications" [*Shindōshi no riron to jissen kōsaku*] in 1934. The main proponent of the incorporation of dialect poetry, Mikami Saitarō, sparred with Fukunaga Akiji, who roundly rejected the incorporation of dialect into the classroom in any form. Kokubun Ichitarō and Isonaga Takeo each contribute a single, more even-keeled essay to the debate, but both are ultimately critical in their interpretations of Mikami's argument.

Mikami offers several justifications for the use of dialect poetry in the classroom (although he later clarifies that he gives short lessons on the topic only once or twice per month) (Mikami, 1979a, pp. 118). Fundamentally, he relies on the assumption that dialect is "part of everyday life, uncomplicated, naturally-expressive," and suited to the recognition and expression of local difference central to the life-writing philosophy. In fact, Mikami's interpretation of vernacular language is *seikatsugo*, or "language of everyday life" (Mikami, 1979b, pp. 103–4). He argues that writing dialect poetry is one way to reduce the mediation between thought, feeling, and self-expression. Whereas standardized-language poetry quickly devolves into a practice in recalling vocabulary words and utilizing them in a restricted and uncreative framework, vernacular language is "truthful" and direct (Mikami, 1979g, pp. 95).

Dialect is thus the natural medium for students' "desire" to be expressed via the mode of "free-verse poetry." Mikami is clearly influenced by Fukushi Kōjirō and the philosophy of regionalism, which he mentions directly, and also cites in the form of reference to dialect as the most "natural" and "essential" way of achieving "metrical form" [*onritsuteki keishiki*]¹⁰—a topic Fukushi wrote extensively about (Mikami, 1979d, pp. 109). Mikami's repeated invocation of vernacular language in conjunction with "the spirit of tradition" (pp. 108–9) seized upon multiple times by Fukunaga (Fukunaga 1979a, pp. 104; Fukunaga, 1979b, pp. 113–4), also betrays his allegiance to Fukushi's work. Clearly, Fukushi and his disciple's efforts bled beyond the boundaries of their insular literary circle.

The three objectors base their critiques on a progressivist conception of national language and a misrepresentation/misunderstanding of the limited role children's dialect poetry plays in Mikami's classroom. The main criticisms complain of the inherent geographic limitations ("narrowness") and legibility of dialect poetry (comparing it to the "mumblings of a drowsing Chinese") (Fukunaga, 1979a, pp. 105; Fukunaga, 1979c, pp. 110; Fukunaga, 1979c, pp. 113), and that while dialect poetry may have redeeming qualities for an adult literary audience, it is inappropriate as an educational paradigm (Fukunaga, 1979a, pp. 106; Fukunaga, 1979b, pp. 115; Kokubun, 1979, pp. 107; Isonaga, 1979, pp. 117). (This, despite Mikami's assertion, in a 1934 article, that children's poetry was distinct from mature literary enterprise, and not an appropriate target for literary critique (Mikami, 1979f, pp.

⁹ I have not seen any scholarship addressing the manifest contradiction between this movement and the "dialect eradication movement" addressed above. The concurrence of these two phenomena was addressed in debates over both dialect poetry and *tsuzurikata*, and speaks to the contested nature of the ideological field in 1920s and 30s Japan.

82). Such reactions follow the modern nationalist paradigm of compulsory education discussed above—namely, as a tool for producing national subjects allied in identity to the nation-state rather than their specific region of origin. Kokubun tempers his critique by framing the debate as “national language policy versus everyday life necessity.” He argues that educators should not teach dialect poetry, but instead look for “the use of dialect in poems of everyday life” as a natural byproduct of the students’ everyday language usage. Thus, the problem is the condition of students being forced to use vernacular language (Kokubun, 1979, pp. 104–6).

The political base of the opposition position is important. Isonaga suggests that poetic composition is a perfect context for the “rectification of dialect” [*hōgen kyōsei*], clearly pathologizing vernacular language as a whole (Isonaga, 1979, pp. 117). Employing a bellicose rhetoric, Fukunaga decries Mikami’s point of view as mere “sentimentalism,” “superficial,” and, tellingly, based on “primitive logic” [*genshiteki riron*] (Fukunaga, 1979a, pp. 106; Fukunaga, 1979b, pp. 113). Fukunaga wishes to instill “high culture,” “universal” values, and “objective expression” in rural students (Fukunaga, 1979a, pp. 106; Fukunaga, 1979c, pp. 110–1). The call for “objectivity” indexes again the wider contemporary discourses on modernization and scientism. This is the promise of “proper Japanese (national language)” [*tadashii nihongo (kokugo)*], part of an educational program necessary for the “development” [*kaitaku*] of Japan’s regions. Note too that this term “development” was contemporaneously applied vigorously to the empire’s act of establishing and controlling colonies (Fukunaga, 1979a, pp. 105; Fukunaga, 1979c, pp. 111; Fukunaga, 1979b, pp. 115). This choice of words firmly identifies Fukunaga with a progressivist, nationalist stance. Mikami rightly calls out this perspective as a “culture of the centralized authority,” which, through modern disciplines like linguistics and archaeology, has posited regional languages to be relics of the past (Mikami, 1979d, pp. 108).

While the debates themselves were limited to these several exchanges among just four educators, the fact that Mikami drew inspiration directly from Fukushi Kōjirō is notable and deserves consideration. What is particularly interesting is dialect poetry’s plasticity when incorporated into different ideological contexts: while Fukushi held proto fascist ideas and was vehemently anti-progressivism, the technique of his praxis was seamlessly incorporated into an educational paradigm of proletarian children’s literature. Yet, the reverberations of the impact of regionalism spread further than that.

5. Contemporary Inheritances of Dialect Poetry

The direct pedagogical connection between Fukushi and dialect poetry gradually faded with the death Ichinohe’s cohort around the reign change to Heisei in 1989. Still, the influence of his and his students’ work can be seen in continuing interest in dialect poetry. Additionally, there exists a variety of contemporary performers who emphasize the role of vernacular Tsugaru language in their work. It may be debatable as to how directly the following artists fall into the lineage of the discourses introduced above—indeed, as Tanaka Yukari has argued, dialect has grown in “prestige” throughout the country in tandem with the ubiquitous spread of standardized Japanese [*hyōjungo*]. However, regardless of the specific inspirations for their choices, they continue in a similar spirit of viewing vernacular language as a combination of tradition and identity connected to place.

The closest inheritor of “dialect poetry” is Kudō Masahiro. Kudō is a poet, translator, and scholar of Russian literature who has actively engaged in writing dialect literature. He is the author of a long-form prose poem *TSUGARU: Narrative Voice and a Lesson on Stylistics* [*TSUGARU: monogatari no koe, buntairon ressun*] (the publisher Michitani refers to his “Tsugaru mother tongue”) (Publisher Michitani) and *A Long-desired Ending and Beginning: My ‘Tsugaru’ Dialect Poems* [*Natsukashii owari to hajimari: boku no Tsugaru hōgenshi*]. His writing combines themes of topophilia [*basho ai*] and primitivism, creating a synchronic image combining ancient Jōmon, classic dialect poetry, and personal memory (Sakaguchi, 2007, pp. 96–105). The interpenetration between

present and past, identity and communal memory thematized in these works strongly recall Fukushi's theorization of regionalism and traditionalism over half a century before.

Another actor in the Tsugaru-vernacular literary field has been the singer Yoshi Ikuzō (Kamata Yoshihito). Locally, the singer (whose stage name is a pun meaning "Let's do it!") is lauded for his representation of his hometown of Goshogawara on the national stage, and a small museum/recording studio has recently been constructed there in his honor (<http://ikuzo-cm.jp/>). While his debut album *You are my One Lover* [*Koibito ha kimi hitori*] came out in 1973, it was his 1984 release of "*I'm Goin' to Tokyo!*" [*Ora Tōkyō sa igu da*] that cemented his career success (<https://441930.jp/profile>). This latter work, sung in Tsugaru vernacular, achieved national popularity as what has been described as the first instance of Japanese rap music. The song begins:

"I'm Goin' to Tokyo!"

Ain't no TVs, ain't no radios

Ain't so many cars on the streets

Ain't no pianos, ain't no bars

The cops walk their beat 'round and around

Wake in the mornin', take the cows out

Walk two hours plus on into town

[...] (<http://www.utamap.com/showkasi.php?surl=31804>. My translation.)

While Yoshi's oeuvre is not marked by repeated use of vernacular speech in this style, this song is important enough to merit mention in terms of popular literary deployment of the dialect. It bears noting that Yoshi recently released a new tongue-in-cheek rap-single simply entitled "TSUGARU" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UVAWjRnMQfM>). Like "*I'm Goin' to Tokyo!*," "TSUGARU" is sung entirely in vernacular style. It contrasts with the former, however, in that it is a paean to the Tsugaru region: thirty five years after goin' to the capital, Yoshi entreats his young audience to appreciate and revisit their native places.

Ina Kapppei (Satō Motonobu) is another Tsugaru artist with a pun for his stage name: *inakapei* is a medieval literary archetype [*katagi*] of a "country bumpkin." Unlike Yoshi Ikuzō, Ina Kapppei's persona is almost completely bound up with his use of vernacular speech. An eclectic artist appearing on television and radio, he is a poet, cartoonist, singer/songwriter, and director. Ina Kapppei is a comic media personality, and this comes through in his poetry as well. The titular poem of his first collection, published in 1974, is as follows:

"Graffiti Written in Eraser"

Oh my!

Just as I thought: if you really write in eraser there's nothin' at all to see. (Ina, 1989 [1974], pp. 252–3. My translation.)

This type of humor is entirely absent from the Fukushi school of regionalism. That said, Ina Kappei does handle the same themes of locality, addressing local landmarks, places, seasons, weather, and even rewriting local folksongs as contemporary farce. And, for example, in his poem “Mount Iwaki,” he expresses concern about changes in the relationship between person and place as he describes seeing a young woman in high heels standing at the peak after riding a bus instead of climbing by herself (Ina, 1989 [1974], pp. 132–7). Thus, although his poetic style and self-branding may seem to place him into a different category from Ichinohe and his colleagues, and literary historians and literary museum curators do not put him in that lineage, Ina Kappei certainly represents one of the greatest voices in Tsugaru dialect poetry today.

Perhaps the second most popular figure associated with dialect poetry alive in Tsugaru today is Shibutani Hakuryū (Hippo). Shibutani appears monthly on an NHK-Aomori broadcast called “Senryū in Country Tongue” [*o-kuni kotoba de senryū*] (<https://www.nhk.or.jp/aomori/senryu/>). Senryū are structured as 17 mora divided into three sections—much like haiku—with subject matter focused on human nature and humor. Shibutani solicits poetic contributions utilizing a particular Tsugaru vernacular word or theme from the public. The best of the submissions are written on *irogami* poster boards with watercolor illustrations and presented and analyzed on the show.

Shibutani additionally works with Satō Tsuru as leaders of “Wa no mukashi-ko” [Japanese folk stories]. Wa no mukashi-ko is a group of amateur storytellers who are trained by Satō and perform in various locations throughout the local area. The group maintains an impressive library of stories across many genres ranging from the humorous to the touching to the frightening. Although some of the stories are imported from other prefectures, all have been domesticated in some form or another to reflect local customs, culture, landmarks, and, of course, language. All the members study Tsugaru vernacular language and adapt scripts provided by Shibutani and Satō for performance in their individual language. Group members have given recitals in cafes, performed at old folk’s homes, at antenna shops, and in the city public library. While perhaps beyond the purview of what many would classify as “literary” use of Tsugaru language, the amateur use in both the senryū and storytelling is another example of the conscious mobilization of localized language in a performative mode.

6. Conclusion

This brief overview introduces the most major examples of literary use of vernacular language in the Tsugaru region, making the significant additions of popular, amateur, and children’s writing to the conventional narratives of so-called dialect literature. While not completely comprehensive (it does not touch on examples in folk music, stage, or radio drama), it does make an effort to introduce elements previously absent from that narrative. Namely, it addresses the debate over “dialect poetry” in the early-Shōwa life-writing movement, the popular writings of Ina Kappei and Yoshi Ikuzō’s rap music, as well as the contemporary outreach toward amateur writers and performers conducted by Shibutani Hakuryū. These additions reveal reverberations extending from Fukushi’s initial movement which have remained heretofore hidden, suggesting a wider and longer-lasting effect across the real literary field than previously imagined within academic literature. By broadening our definition beyond the outmoded notion of “pure literature” in this way, it becomes clear that dialect literature is not merely a relic to be left to the archives and literary museums, but rather a living and expanding (if still limited) aspect of local culture. Future iterations of this project shall, on the one hand, look further to the margins of the literary field to elucidate the full depth and breadth of dialect literature’s reach; and on the other hand, engage in close readings and contextualization of the individual texts and textual producers themselves—a perspective essential to gaining a more holistic understanding of the local Tsugaru literary scene.

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