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The Graphic Representation of Tōhoku Dialect in Contemporary Japanese Prose

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the language ideologies behind the graphic and graphemic representation of Tōhoku dialect in contemporary Japanese prose. Despite being negatively perceived, recent interest in this variety has prompted its inclusion in literary works. Analyzing ten novels, this research examines authors' strategies in navigating the complexities of portraying the characteristics of Tōhoku dialect within the frame of the Japanese writing system. Emphasis is placed on the techniques used to represent non-standard phonology of this variety, such as the choice of script as well as other forms of visual representation. Based on the assumption that writers are also carriers of language ideologies (Spitzmüller 2012: 257), the ideological implications of these choices are also established. The findings indicate that while various strategies were employed, there is a tendency to choose hiragana and kanji over katakana, which emphasizes familiarity and the connection with standard Japanese, indicating the influence of the ideology of the national language. Practical factors, such as understandability for potential readers, also play an important role. Some techniques, such as the use of graphic symbols, perpetuate the stereotype about the incomprehensibility of the Tōhoku dialect.

KEYWORDS: language ideologies, Tōhoku dialect, graphemic representation, writing system, eye dialect

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Introduction

With the increase in scholarly interest in the topic of writing, script can no longer be called "the wandering outcast of linguistics" (Derrida 1997: 44). From a sociolinguistic perspective, it is evident that writing is not merely a symbolic representation of spoken language but rather a complex system, which requires shared understanding between writers and readers, shaped also by non-linguistic factors. In numerous instances, we observe the entwining of writing with the identity of speech communities, as in the famous case of Hindi and Urdu, written, despite their similarities, in distinct alphabets reflective of their respective communities' religions (Jochnowitz 2019: 179–180). In the former Yugoslavia, in order to ascent its national identity, Croatia completely eschews the Cyrillic alphabet in favour of the Roman alphabet, while Serbia pursues a contrasting trajectory (Collin 2011: 15). In many cases, speakers display a strong emotional attitude toward specific spelling variations and scripts, leading to conflicts and heated discussions, which can be seen, for example, in the debate around the German orthography reform of 1996 (Johnson 2005: 119). For these reasons, Spitzmüller (2012: 256) suggests to extend Silverstein's concept of language ideologies to encompass the graphic modes of communication. As a result, a new sociolinguistic field is emerging with the objective of studying beliefs attributed to and expressed by not only the choice of writing systems, but also orthography, typography and graphic features.

The aim of this paper is to explore the ideologies behind the graphic and graphemic representation of Tōhoku dialect in contemporary Japanese prose. Spoken in the north-west, rural part of the country, this variety is the most negatively perceived among Japanese dialects, often subjected to ridicule through stigmatizing media depictions. However, in recent years, especially after Tōhoku earthquake in 2011, there has been an increase in interest in this region, which has led to the publication of many literary works featuring this dialect. However, it must be noted that in the case of literary presentation of dialects, one is dealing with a fictitious dialect based on stereotypical features, rather than real language use. This phenomenon, the use of nonstandard spelling in order to index regional characteristics, is called "eye-dialect" (Brett 2009: 49). Due to the complexities inherent in the Japanese writing system, portraying the differences between standard Japanese and a dialect poses a considerable challenge.

In this study eleven contemporary novels were examined, exploring the strategies authors have adopted to address those difficulties. Particular attention was paid to the techniques used to represent non-standard phonology of this variety, such as the selection of the script as well as other

forms of the visual representation of Tōhoku dialect. Based on the assumption that writing and spelling are also carriers of symbolic meaning, the ideological implications of these choices are established. As a result of such analysis, it is possible to observe how the meaning of specific, situated utterances of dialect representation is constructed through references to meta-linguistic knowledge about Japanese variation and broader societal perceptions.

The titles of analyzed Japanese works are followed by my own English translations in parentheses. All romanization and excerpt translations are done by myself.

1. Japanese writing system in the light of language ideologies

Before I proceed to the analysis of the graphemic representation of the Tōhoku dialect, it is worth saying a few words about the ideological assumptions behind the Japanese writing system. The modern standard writing system consists of logographic characters borrowed from Chinese, known as *kanji*, and two moraic scripts: *hiragana* and *katakana*. The characters came to Japan through Korea around the 6–7th centuries. However, as they were designed for a language with a distinct typology, it was necessary to adapt them for writing in Japanese. One of strategies was *man'yōgana*, which uses *kanji* characters for their phonetic rather than semantic qualities, eventually leading to the development of phonetic *kana* scripts during the Heian period (794–1185) (Sato 2018: 6). Although *kanji* had long dominated in official written communication, including state documents, at the end of the 19th century their status began to be questioned due to societal changes and Western influences. The usage of sinograms symbolically positioned Japan within the zone of Chinese cultural influence and some believed that their complexity may be an obstacle to the knowledge transfer essential for the modernization of the country. Therefore, Maejima Hisoka advocated for the total elimination of *kanji*, proposing their replacement with the *hiragana* syllabary, while Nishi Amane went a step further by proposing the adoption of the Latin alphabet. Ultimately, Japanese language underwent numerous linguistic reforms, culminating in the establishment of a standard language, including a standardized writing system (Gottlieb 1991: 207–224, Lee 1996: 26–50). Its principles have not changed to this day: *kanji* are generally used for the roots of nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs. *Hiragana*, on the other hand, finds its primary application in representing native or naturalized Japanese words and grammatical elements. Meanwhile, *katakana* is predominantly employed for

foreign words, names, loanwords, onomatopoeia, and occasionally emphasis.

Nevertheless, echoes of these discussions can be heard to this day. Especially, the number of characters to be taught during the compulsory education and used in official government documents is the subject of much deliberation. In 1946, a list of 1850 characters for daily use (*tōyō kanji*) was approved, aiming to simplify the representation of certain words. Despite subsequent debates about limiting the number of characters, in 1981 an updated set of regular-use characters (*jōyō kanji*) expanded the number to 1945 characters. Other than a slight increase in the number of characters, the new list was characterized by loose recommendations, allowing for the use of characters beyond its confines. According to Unger (1996: 121–123), this shift in direction primarily stemmed from the concerns of conservative politicians about further reforms, perceived as a threat to Japanese tradition. In 2010, as a result of alarming news about declining *kanji* proficiency, further changes were introduced to the list, increasing the number of characters to 2136. This shows that although the Japanese writing system is still subject to debate, *kanji* became perceived as an integral part of the Japanese language, which was confirmed by 72% of participants in a 2008 survey about language attitudes (Agency for Cultural Affairs 2008: 6). The belief that logograms constitute the core of the Japanese language is evident even in the realms of linguistics, which results in grammatical descriptions focused around writing rather than morphology and phonology (see: Jabłoński 2021: 73).

The establishment of the modern Japanese writing system took place as part of the standardization process, the aim of which was to create a homogeneous national language. The need of representing other varieties, regarded as inferior within the standard language ideology, was conspicuously disregarded. However, remnants of graphemic diversity persist in form of so-called dialect *kanji* (*hōgen kanji*). These are characters with regional use, mainly appearing in toponyms, like the character 函 in the name of the town of Kannami in Shizuoka Prefecture. Although they do not appear on the *jōyō kanji* list, they were included in the guidelines of the Japanese Language Council and in 2013 a dictionary of dialect *kanji* was published by Sasahara Hiroyuki (Okagaki 2017: 9). Apart from this phenomenon, non-standard varieties are written within the same script combinations as standard Japanese, even if it does not fully reflect their phonology. The issue of developing new writing systems is raised solely in the case of minority languages, such as Ryukyuan (see Ogawa 2015: 577–587), probably because dialects are regarded as spoken varieties. Therefore,

writers who decide to include dialect representations in their works struggle with numerous challenges, and their graphic choices are determined by both ideological and practical factors.

2. Tōhoku dialect

This article will focus on the representation of the Tōhoku dialect, which is spoken in the northeastern part of the island of Honshū. These areas were initially inhabited by the Ainu population, but by the 10th century it was conquered and became a part of the Japanese Empire, although it managed to gain partial independence at some points in time (Kawanishi 2015: 2). After the Meiji Restoration, this region started to be used as a cheap source of supplies for the capital, which led to its increased ruralisation (Gedacht 2023: 21–40). According to the current administrative division, the Tōhoku region consist of six prefectures: Akita, Aomori, Fukushima, Iwate, Miyagi, and Yamagata. Due to this vast area, it would be more appropriate to speak of a group of dialects with significant differences between them. However, in this article, these varieties will be referred as a single entity, as the focus is not on the actual dialects of this region but an eye-dialect – a fictional representation based on stereotypical linguistic features, created to distinguish dialect speakers in the text, while also referring to general social associations related to the region and its dialects.

The dialects from Tōhoku, particularly from Aomori prefecture, have the reputation of the most incomprehensible of all the Japanese dialects. In a survey conducted on a news website, Tōhoku prefectures were in the top ten most difficult dialects, and three of them were in the top four (Tanaka 2024) The explanation lies partly in the isolated nature of the region, which considerably hindered opportunities for language contact. In these peripheral and partially autonomous areas, the impact of the capital was notably restricted, and linguistic changes occurred later or not at all, which can explain the presence of some remnants of Old Japanese in the modern dialect (see: Frellesvig 2010: 36). A detailed description of the linguistic features of this variety can be found in the publication *Hōgen-to Hyōjungo Nihongo Hōgengaku Gaisetsu* ('Dialects and standard language: an overview of Japanese dialectology', 1975) edited by Ōishi and Uemura. The studies on local varieties of the Tōhoku dialect, such as Hirayama 2003 focusing on dialects from Aomori prefecture or Nakagawa's 2022 description of Nambu dialect, are also worth mentioning. Undoubtedly, the most characteristic trait of the Tōhoku dialect is neutralization of the vowels /i/ and /u/, which are pronounced as the closed central unrounded vowel [ɨ] ~ [ʉ], rendering homophonous words such as *sushi* 'sushi', *shishi* 'lion' and

susu 'soot', which sound almost identical (Hirayama 2003: 15–17). It is to this phenomenon that the Tōhoku dialect owes its nickname*: zūzūben*, as well as the common belief that its speakers hardly open their mouths when speaking. Table 1 illustrates the most important linguistic features of this variety:

features	examples	standard Japapanese
phonological		
neutralization of the vowels /i/ and /u/ as /ɨ/ or /ʉ/	[sɪ̈sɪ̈] 'sushi'	[ˈsuːʃi]
monophthongization of /ai/, /ae/, /oe/, and /oi/	[ɯme] 'delicious'	[ɯ̜ma̠i]
intervocalic voicing of obstruents /	[iɡɯ] 'go'	[ikɯ̜]
prenasalization of unvoiced consonants	[hiⁿdʒi] 'elbow'	[çiʑi]
occurrence of the sound [ɸ]	[ɸasɪ̈] 'chopsticks'	[ha̠ɕi]
morphological		
plain non-past negative form -*ne*	*ine* 'does not exist'	*inai*
suffix -*be* as the marker of conjecture, confirmation, suggestion or proposal	*igube* 'let's go'	*ikō*
suffix -*kero* in constructions of mild requests	*yamete-kero* 'please stop'	*yamete-kudasai*
locative case marker -*sa*	*sensha-sa* 'in the tank'	*sensha-ni*
accusative case marker -*ba*	*shuryūdan-ba nageru* 'to throw a grenade'	*shuryūdan-o nageru*
lexical		
first person pronouns	*ora, wa* 'I'	*watashi*
second person pronouns	*anda, omē* 'you'	*anata, omae*
interjections of agreement	*n da* 'that's right'	*sō da*
loanwords from the Ainu language	*magiri* 'knife'	*naifu*

Table 1. Selected linguistic features of Tōhoku dialect. Based on: Ōishi and Uemura 1975, Hirayama 2003, Kumagai 2019.

Based on research on the perception of Japanese dialects, Tōhoku is seen the most negatively. Inoue (1999: 149) found that it has the worst intellectual image, and in Long's (1999: 205) survey, only a small percentage of informants from the Kantō area regarded it as pleasant. In a 2007 questionnaire it was often described as "simple", "warm", and "funny", but also "ugly" and "lacking in charm" (Tanaka 2011: 72). Stigmatizing and ridiculing media representations significantly contribute to the reinforcement of the negative image associated with this linguistic variety. The portrayal of this particular dialect relies on the exaggeration of its distinctive features, and errors and misconceptions are frequently perpetuated (Kumagai 2019: 113). In popular talk shows, hosts employ it for parodies and jokes rooted in stereotypes (Kumagai 2012: 22–23). Furthermore, in the translations of foreign productions, it is utilized as an equivalent to the most unfavourably regarded varieties, such as the language of American rednecks (Kumagai 2011: 164). Another example would be the Japanese translation of the novel *Gone with the Wind*, in which the pseudo-Tōhoku dialect was selected as a dynamic equivalent of slave speech, using its negative associations (Hiramoto 2009: 260). In recent years, however, there has been a significant increase in interest in this variety, and speakers themselves are also more willing to speak out. For example, Everhart's (2018) ethnographic research in the area of Morioka, Iwate Prefecture, has proven that some members of the young generation can be considered "decolonized", because they consciously refuse to conform to the norms of standard Japanese (ibid., 128–140).

3. Strategies of graph(em)ic representation of Tōhoku dialect

The sudden increase in interest in Tōhoku dialect can be attributed to dual factors. Firstly, it is a result of the ongoing "dialect boom" (*hōgen būmu*) since the 1990s, which has led to a heightened general interest in local linguistic varieties. On the other hand, after the Tōhoku 2011 earthquake and tsunami, many people wanted to show their support for the affected areas. This also resulted in a number of literary texts dedicated to Tōhoku: some addressed the tragedy directly, others simply presented the culture and language of the region. They were well received by both readers and critics: in 2013, Seikō Itō's novel *Sōzō Rajio* ('Imaginary radio', 2013), which tells the story of a radio program in which victims of the disaster speak, won the Noma Prize and was nominated for the Akutagawa and Mishima Prizes. This initiated a series of awards for works dealing with this theme, which can also be interpreted as a sign of support for the communities of Tōhoku. The dialect appeared and played a vital role in many of these texts, symbolically

giving a voice to those who had previously been silenced and excluded (see: Kato 2019, Iwata-Weickgenannt 2023).

In this article I analyze 11 post-1980 works in terms of their graphic and graphemic portrayal of Tōhoku dialect. Table 2 presents all the included texts along with their bibliographic data. Conversely, their bibliographic data is not repeated in the References.

title	reference
Inoue Hisashi, *Kirikirijn* ('The people of Kirkiri'). Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1981.	Inoue 1981
Itō Seikō, *Sōzō rajio* ('Imaginary radio'). Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 2013.	Itō 2013
Kimura Yūsuke, *Yōnako-no seisen* ('Children's crusade'). Tokyo: Shūeisha, 2023.	Kimura 2023
Kimura Yūsuke, *Isa-no hanran* (*Isa's Deluge*). Tokyo: Miraisha, 2016.	Kimura 2016
Koshigaya Osamu, *Itomichi* ('Ito'). Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2011.	Koshigaya 2011
Numata Shinsuke, *Eiri* ('Beneath the shadow'). Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū, 2019.	Numata 2019
Takahashi Hiroki, *Okuribi* ('Obon bonfire'). Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 2008.	Takahashi 2008
Sasaki Kyōseki, *Jiyoppare Aomori-no hoshi* ('The stubborn star from Aomori'). Tokyo: Kadokawa Sunīkā Bunko, 2022.	Sasaki 2022
Uchidate Makiko, *Chiisana kamitachi-no matsuri* ('The festival of small gods'). Tokyo: Ushio Shuppansha, 2021.	Uchidate 2021
Wakatake Chisako, *Ora ora-de hitori igu-mo* ('Everyone goes alone'). Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 2017.	Wakatake 2017
Yū Miri, *JR Uenoeki kōen-guchi* (*Tokyo Ueno Station*). Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 2014.	Yū 2014

Table 2. Literary texts analysed in the article.

Although the vast majority are texts written after 2000 amid the surge of interest in this part of Japan, Inoue's *Kirikirijin* ('The people of Kirikiri',

1981) was also included as the first, revolutionary attempt to represent Tōhoku dialect in contemporary literature. The texts vary in genre as well as the origin of the authors, some being speakers of one of the Tōhoku varieties themselves, other using the help of language consultants.

The analysis showed that there is no single, generally accepted way of writing the Tōhoku dialect. In the analysed works, the authors develop their own methods to graphically illustrate the differences between this variety and standard Japanese. These strategies may be dictated by practical reasons, such as the desire to make reading easier for readers who are not speakers of the dialect, but they are also rooted in existing linguistic ideologies and involve symbolic meanings. The vast majority of authors use the Japanese writing system, using *kana* syllabaries and *kanji* characters in varying proportions. The methods appearing in the analysed texts include:

    a)   the use of non-standard *furigana*
    b)   writing in *hiragana*
    c)   writing in *katakana*
    d)   the use of other graphic symbols.

3.1 The use of non-standard *furigana*

Furigana is a type of reading aid with small hiragana characters printed either above or next to kanji. It usually serves as a support in text intended for audiences with lower language skills or for characters that are rarely used. However, Ezaki (2010: 192) points out that in literary texts it may also be used to annotate non-standard reading, especially for artistic effect based on contrast between two semantic layers. The title of Fukawa Genichirō's essay is a perfect example:

ひょうじゅんご
訛音矯正の思想

(Fukawa 2007: 79, cited in Ezaki 2010: 192)

While the *kanji* combination literally means 'correction of regional accents', the reading *hyōjungo* 'standard language' is placed in *furigana*. In this way, the author expresses his belief that the creation of standard Japanese at the same time meant the eradication of regional dialects. *Furigana* is also widely used for translations, as it allows to create a multilingual effect while maintaining comprehensibility (Sato 2018: 17). In Tsubouchi's translation of *Romeo and Juliet* the word 'cupid' was written in characters as 戀愛神

'god of romantic love' with the *furigana* containing English loanword キューピッド *kyūpiddo* (Sato 2018: 12).

All three uses of the non-standard *furigana* can be found in the analysed texts. Most frequently it is employed to annotate the reading with dialectal phonological features, as can be seen in Inoue 1981 (example 1).

1. 「二十三歳す。集団就職で東京さ行って下着工場さ勤めで居だんだけっとも、一年ばっかで工場ば辞めて、あっちこちさ勤め変えて、二十歳の時にヌードさなったのす」

> *"Nujūsan-sae su. Sūdansūsoku-de Tōcho-sa ette sutagikōba-sa tsutomede edan-dake ttomo, ichinen bakkade kōba-ba yamete, atchikotchi-sa tsutomekaete, hadatsu-no toki-ni nūdo-sa natta-no su."*

> "[My sister] is twenty-three years old. She went to Tokyo to work in a lingerie factory, but quit after a year, worked here and there, and began stripping at the age of twenty."
>
> (Inoue 1981: 76)

In the romanization, words that have been glossed with a non-standard reading are marked in bold italics. For example, the four-character phrase 二十三歳 'twenty-three years', read as *nijūsan-sai* in standard Japanese, is accompanied by the *furigana nujūsan-sae*, intended to approximate how it would be pronounced by a Tōhoku dialect speaker, taking into account the phonological features of this variations such as neutralization of the vowels /i/ and /u/.

Another example can be found in Kimura 2016.

2. 「おじいさーん、すいませーん。突然ですが、歳はおいくつですか?」
「おらが? おらは、八十五さなる」

> *"Ojisān, suimasēn. Totsuzen desu-ga, toshi-wa oikutsu desu-ka?'"*
> *"Ora-ga? Ora-wa, hachizūgo-sa naru."*

> "Grandpa, excuse me for this sudden question, but how old are you?"
> "Me? I'm eighty-five."
>
> (Kimura 2016: 15)

Furigana is also used in translation when the lexemes in the standard language and the dialect differ etymologically, or are not immediately recognizable as cognates. A good example is the word *mengoi* 'cute', one of the most emblematic lexemes for Tōhoku dialect and an equivalent to standard Japanese *kawaii* 可愛い. It appears in Sasaki 2022 with *furigana,* even though the standard Japanese *kanji* is used.

3.「ま、まあ、全部が全部嘘でねくてよがったねが。それに
こうすて見るど案外可愛いがもわがんねえびの」

> *"Ma, mā, zembu-ga zembu uso denekute yogatta-ne-ga. Sore-ni kō sutemirudo angai **mengoi**-ga-mo wagannē-bi-no"*

> "Well, well, I'm glad it was not all a lie. Also, when I look more, it's surprisingly cute."

<div align="right">(Sasaki 2022: 146)</div>

Moreover, when the same character appears in the narration or utterance made by standard language speaker, it is accompanied by the furigana *kawaii*, further emphasizing the contrast between the two varieties.

Finally, in rare cases one can find examples of language play using the differences between different semantic layers. In Inoue 1981, the main character goes to a brothel, where he meets a beautiful woman who, abandoned by her husband, decided to take up this profession.

4.「妾の前の亭主は五年前に家ば出でそれっきり音沙汰の
無い」

> *"**Wadazu**-no **saki**-no **goten**-wa gonen-**mē**-ni **e**-ba dede sorekkiri **otosada**-no **nēi**"*

> "My previous husband left five years ago and I haven't heard anything about him since."

<div align="right">(Inoue 1981: 335)</div>

As she is telling the main character the story of her life, she refers to herself by the pronoun *wadazu*, which is a dialectal pronunciation of the standard first-person pronoun *watashi*. However, instead of the standard 私 character, the kanji 妾 is used, which can be read as the archaic female pronoun *warawa* or *mekake* 'lover, concubine', which ironically corresponds to her profession.

The strategy of using *kanji* and non-standard *furigana* has primarily practical advantages, because the audience is able to read and understand the text fluently, while at the same time being able to imagine how the characters speak, which is crucial in the case of literature. This way of writing, however, may perpetuate the belief in the homogeneity of Japanese, as regional differences are reduced to different readings of the same characters. Moreover, it corresponds to the belief that *kanji* are the one of the essential parts of Japanese language, which can be traced back to Tokieda Motoki's linguistic theories (Lee 1996: 212), but is still present in Japanese linguistics and social perception (see section 1).

3.2 Writing in *hiragana*

An alternative to the use of non-standard *furigana* is to completely or partially abandon ideograms and focus on phonetic syllabaries. Although the choice between *kanji* and *hiragana* may seem arbitrary (Ezaki 2010: 186), in many cases script choices follow script ideologies and aesthetics, in addition to indexing and defining identities, registers, and local stance-taking acts (see Robertson 2021). Therefore, the tendency to write the utterances of Tōhoku dialect speakers using mainly or exclusively *hiragana,* observed in many works can be examined in terms of language ideologies. Sasaki 2022 is a good example of this practice, as almost all of the utterances of the main character – a dialect speaker – are accompanied by a translation into the standard language made by his co-worker, making it possible to compare two versions:

> 5.　「わ、わのどごばまねんだすか!? 戦闘のどぎってばいっちばんさぎさたってけっぱってあったのすよ！ 怪我人ばでればあさまがらばげまであずがってだのに！ そいでばまねがったんだすか!」（…）【私のどこがダメなのですか。戦闘の時は一番先頭に立って頑張っていたんで　すよ。怪我人が出れば朝から晩まで介護したのに。それではダメでしたか】

> *"Wa, wa no-dogo-ba manen dasu-ka!? Sentō-no dogi-tte-ba itchiban sagi-sa tattekeppatteatta-no su-yo! Keganin-ba dereba asama-gara bage-made azugatteda-no-ni! Soide-ba manegatta-n dasu-ka!" (...)"*
> [*Watashi-no doko-ga dame-na-no desu-ka. Sentō-no toki-wa ichiban sentō-ni tatte gambatteita-n-desu-yo. Keganin-ga dereba asa-kara ban-made kaigo shita-no-ni. Sorede-wa dame deshita-ka]*

"What did I do wrong? During battles, I was first at the front and gave my all. When someone was injured, I took care of him from morning to evening. Was it useless?"

(Sasaki 2022: 11)

In the original utterance, only two words are written in *kanji*: *sentō* 戦闘 'battle' and *keganin* 怪我人 'wounded people', while in translation into the standard language there were ten of them. This also applies to words that have commonly used ideograms like 時: in standard Japanese it is pronounced as *toki* 'time', however here it was written directly in *hiragana* in accordance with Tōhoku dialect's phonology.

This strategy helps to better convey the sound layer of this variety, as well as accentuate lexical differences. From a practical perspective, it is also less time-consuming and easier to read, which may explain why it is chosen by many authors. On the other hand, Robertson's (2019: 2) research has shown that *hiragana* is often treated as children's script (in contrast with the 'more adult' *kanji*) – a visual symbol of their lower level of linguistic competence, and even when it is not a direct marker of age, it is still used to evoke associations with youthfulness, frivolity or even foolishness. Thus, such choice might be rooted in the ideological belief that Tōhoku dialect users are less educated.

3.3 Writing in *katakana*

Katakana is frequently used to write single dialect lexemes, as well as to mark individual, non-standardly pronounced syllables, as in the scene from Koshigaya 2011, when the dialect speaker introduces herself to a coworker:

      6.「よろ、よろスくおねがいスます。」

      "Yoro, yorosuku onegaisumasu"

      "Nice to meet you."

(Koshigaya 2011: 27)

The heroine retains dialectal phonological features, such as vowel neutralization, even when she tries to speak the standard language, which is emphasized by the use of the *katana* character ス *su* instead of the standard Japanese し *shi*.

Writing exclusively in *katakana* is less popular, but can be seen in Kimura 2016:

7. コレンドア 、 コ ノ マ マ 、 イ ッ シ ョ ウ 、
カイシンスルゴドア、ネェンダベナ。コレンドア、
ズーット、コヤッテキタンダベナ。

*Korendoa, kono mama, isshō, **kaishin suru godoa** nēn dabe-na.*
*Korendoa, zūtto, **kō yatte kitan dabe-na**"*

I don't think these guys will ever change their minds. They've always been like this.

(Kimura 2016: 104)

In this case, the notation is only phonetic. At the same time, for fear that it might be incomprehensible to readers, a translation into the standard language in smaller *hiragana* was also placed above the words which received atypical *furigana* are marked in bold in the romanization. The decision to use *katakana* instead of *hiragana* may have been dictated by the desire to graphically distinguish this fragment from the rest of the text, since it does not appear in other dialect utterances in the novel. It seems that *katakana*, commonly used to write loan words or the Ainu language, is not considered as a good script for writing dialects, possibly because it evokes a feeling of exoticism and foreignness due to its primary function (Hosokawa 2021: 120).

3.4 The use of other graphic symbols
The last group consists of examples of the use of graphic symbols from outside the Japanese writing system. In the case of the Tōhoku dialect, however, they are not used to represent the sound of this variety, but as a visual symbol of lack of understanding. This is visible in the conversation between the main character who just moved to Aomori from Tokyo and a local elderly woman in Takahashi 2008:

8. 老母は歩の近くまで来ると、手にした杖で鴉　の屍骸をさして
「あれだっきゃからす×　×ぐりでかがしっコがは×　×でな×　×だきゃ」
訛りが強く、ほとんど言葉を理解できない。

Rōba-wa Ayumu-no chikaku-made kuru-to, te-ni shita tsue-de karasu-no shigai-o sashite,

"are dakkya karasu × × guri de kagashikko-ga ha × ×te na × × dakya".
Namari-ga tsuyoku, hotondo kotoba-o rikai dekinai.

When the old woman approached Ayumu, she touched the crow's corpse with her stick and said:
"Only those crows.... × × scarecrow... × ×"
Her accent was so strong that he couldn't understand most of what she said.

(Takahashi 2008: 55)

Unintelligible expressions in the old woman's utterance are represented by ✕ signs. In this way, the author tries to reproduce the experience of the main character who finds himself surrounded by an unfamiliar language variety. A similar situation occurs in Koshigaya 2011, where a significant part of the utterances made by the main character's grandmother, who is supposed to speak classic Tsugaru dialect, is replaced with mathematical symbols:

9. 後ろから呼びかけると、超絶高速プレイがぴたりと止まった。畳にちょこん正座した祖母がこちらを振りかける。垂れた頬の肉がぷるんと揺れた。
「おろー、いと、Y⊃∂∞# ∠¥⊂ΔTπδΨ∠"
「いま帰ってきたばかりだっきゃ」

Ushiro-kara yobikakeru-to, chōzetsu kōsoku purei-ga pitari-to tomatta. Tatami-ni chokon-to seiza shita sobo-ga kochira-o furikaeru. Tareta hoho-no niku-ga purunto yureta.
"Orō, Ito, Y⊃∂∞# ∠¥⊂ΔTπδΨ∠."
"Ima kaettekita-bakari dakkya."

When she called from behind, the fast-paced game stopped. Her grandmother, who was sitting curled up on the tatami, looked at her and her sunken cheeks moved:
"Hey, Ito Y⊃∂∞# ∠¥⊂ΔTπδΨ∠"
"I just got back."

(Koshigaya 2011: 27)

However, in this case, granddaughter Ito has no problem with the answer because, as a dialect speaker herself she understands it perfectly. This is proof that although the work seems to be written from the perspective of Tōhoku dialect speaker, in fact the external perspective is adopted. As a result, the variety is presented as some sort of enigmatic cipher. Only a

persistent reader has the opportunity to unravel it, as the book concludes with a legend that translates these symbols into hiragana characters. In this way, the text perpetuates a common belief that this variety is incomprehensible and does not give the reader a chance to form their own opinion. Moreover, the author from Tokyo avoids the need to imitate the way of speaking of the oldest speakers of this dialect.

Thus, graphemic and graphic analysis reveals two main tendencies in the portrayal of the Tōhoku dialect. The first is to emphasize that this variety belongs to the Japanese language by choosing familiar Japanese scripts such as *kanji* or *hiragana*. The second one is the reinforcement of the prejudices about Tōhoku dialect as difficult to understand. This presents authors with the challenge of how to show that incomprehensibility but at the same time enable readers to comprehend the text. Consequently, the choice of the strategy used to create an eye-dialect can also be viewed in terms of the author's position on the degree of difference from standard Japanese. The use of *hiragana* and *katakana* to express phonological equivalents seems to emphasize the similarity of the two varieties, assuming that it will be understandable to the reader. Adding *kanji* characters, which retain their semantics, can be seen as a way to support the comprehension of potential readers. The use of the X symbol in place of part of an utterance indicates partial intelligibility of this variety, while mathematical symbols indicate a complete lack of it. This indicates the authors' varied approaches to the stereotype about the incomprehensibility of the Tōhoku dialect to a speaker of standard Japanese.

Conclusions

The appearance of dialect in a literary text is a unique kind of dialect representation. This is because writers try to create the impression of a spoken language, while at the same time dealing with the limitations of writing systems. Practical issues, such as comprehensibility for potential readers or the level of dialectal competence of the authors, play an important role in choosing the scripts, as does the desired artistic effect. Nevertheless, it is indisputable that the language ideologies prevalent in Japanese society also exert a discernible influence. Based on the results of the analysis of the graphic and graphemic representation of the Tōhoku dialect in contemporary prose it was established that biased perceptions, such as the stereotype of the Tōhoku dialect as an unintelligible variety of Japanese, still exist. However, authors' beliefs about the degree of difference between standard Japanese and this variety may vary and be context-dependant. Some decisions, such as preference for the familiarity-inducing *hiragana* over exotic *katakana* or

attempts at universalization using *kanji* seem to be dictated by "an imagined sense of linguistic unity" (Heinrich 2012: 172), within which dialects can only exist as less developed variants of standard Japanese – an idea which can be traced back to the national language ideology that developed during the Meiji period in the process of creating a nation state, as described by Lee (1996). Further studies should compare these results with strategies employed in representing other dialects or minority languages in Japan, and discern the impact of other factors such as the linguistic prestige.

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