

**Edwin Michielsen**

*University of Toronto*

**Translating the Proletariat in Esperanto: Nakagaki Kojirō,  
(Inter)national Literature, and (Un)translatability**

During the 1920s and early 1930s, proletarian Esperantists translated local struggles of disenfranchised people through literature, letters, textbooks, and dictionaries across various parts of the world in a universal lexicon of the international auxiliary language Esperanto. But how could such putatively universal meanings be rendered in a planned language? Was Esperanto capable of representing something that national languages could not? Could it successfully transmit the diverse proletarian experiences into a single semantics? These questions warrant further investigation, especially when read aside theories on language and translation. Esperanto was based solely on translation and was developed as a written language because it lacked native speakers in its infancy. In order to use Esperanto as a language for a world literature of the proletariat, writers had to acquire high proficiency in Esperanto while also rethink the relationship between national and world literature.

In this presentation, I discuss Nakagaki Kojirō's (1894–1977) Esperanto Translation Laboratory (1934) to examine translation theories set forth by proletarian Esperantists in relation to the production of a world literature in Esperanto. Nakagaki started learning Esperanto at the Seoul Esperanto Society in Korea. Observing the colonial violence in Korea while reading through many leftist works, Nakagaki was determined to use Esperanto as “weapon” in favor of class and ethnic conflicts. Upon his return to Japan, he continued to publish Esperanto learning materials and was among the founding members of the Japanese proletarian Esperanto movement. After years of experience teaching and translating Esperanto, he published Esperanto Translation Laboratory.

Examining Nakagaki's translation manual, I aim to illustrate how he grappled with the difficulties of Esperanto translation, especially the problem of equivalence and accuracy between meanings of words from different languages. Through translation, Nakagaki explored possibilities to open up the Esperanto lexicon to non-European words to alter the Eurocentric vocabulary of Esperanto into a more international language suitable for a world literature.