

Making Yonsei

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Mom,
what are you saying?
What'd you mean,
How come I don't know? and *What kind
Japanese are you?* Don't act
like I'm supposed to know these words. You
never told them to me before. You always said,

*three not chree
I am not I stay
like that not li-dat.*

How am I supposed to know
anything but Buddha's
not just the sculpture in our living room,
the one my friends made fun, he's a man
who sat under the bodhi tree and thought thought thought:

*Call me at the office and if my secretary answers, give me a page; if I don't
answer within five
minutes, call my cell; I'll keep it on just for you,*

you told me that.

You only use these words now
because you know your friend
likes them;

he thinks they're *neat*
and *interesting*.

I know what he wants.

He wants a little Local Japanese:
someone who will teach him

that this is

*gohan not rice
chazuke not rice and tea
ko-ko not pickled cabbage*

the makings of the family meal;

someone who'll buy him
the 10,000 strand red-paper-fire-crackers before
they go on sale at Long's;
someone who will show him just how to eat
the konbu for happiness,
the mochi to make the family stick,
the soba for long life;
someone who will open up the butsudān
and give him "mantras"??

He looks at you
and that's what he sees;
he looks at me
and wonders
what went wrong.