

Subject: A Reflecting Mirror of Japan's High-Growth Period: 'Dialects' and 'Standard Language' in *Suna no Utsuwa*

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*Suna no Utsuwa* is a serialized novel by Matsumoto Seicho that made its debut in the evening edition of *the Yomiuri Shimbun*, also marking his debut in a national newspaper. It is a mystery story that revolves around the presence of similar linguistic features in distant regions, a well-known phenomenon in dialect research, which is used as a tool for misdirection in the mystery genre.

The crux of the mystery centers on the creation of misleading impressions and is encapsulated in the testimony that the individuals associated with the murder at Kamata Station were speaking in 'a dialect resembling the Zu-zu dialect.' Kamata Station is situated in Tokyo, and since Tokyo falls within the Eastern Japanese dialect region, the mention of the Zu-zu dialect within the story initially invokes the dialect stereotype of the Tohoku region. However, while there are similarities between the Tohoku dialect and the Umpaku dialect, differences exist. In this context, we will delve into how Matsumoto Seicho depicted the linguistic characteristics attributed to the dialogue of the characters in the story and whether they align with the real distribution of dialects and their linguistic features.

Firstly, the victim, Miki Kenichi, is portrayed as a character who speaks in a dialect resembling the Tohoku accent. Witnesses reported to the police that his speech had 'an accent that is not typical of the Tokyo dialect,' and they believed he was from Tohoku. They also noted the frequent use of voiced sounds in his speech. However, we cannot confirm the accent from written text alone. Nevertheless, certain features resembling the 'Tohoku accent' can be observed in Miki's dialogue. In standard Japanese pronunciation, "ureshii" is written in kana as /uresui/ (嬉スい) so the Zu-zu accent is expressed in this dialogue. On the other hand, the phenomenon of voicing in the word cannot be confirmed from this dialogue. This is because /koto/ (嬉スいこと) should be written in kana as /goto/ (嬉スいごと) if voiceless consonants were voiced in the word.

If we closely examine the linguistic features present in Miki's dialogue, it becomes evident that Miki's dialect is not actually the Tohoku dialect but is,

in fact, the Umpaku dialect. However, the witnesses are led to believe that Miki's speech has 'a noticeable use of voiced sounds.' This is a deliberate misdirection by Matsumoto Seicho, as he intentionally sets up a misleading reference to the Tohoku dialect. Those well-versed in dialects could have early on confirmed the true dialect by carefully analyzing Miki's dialogue, making it a mechanism for an 'answer check' right here.

The early 1960s, when *Suna no Utsuwa* was written, coincided with the establishment of the foundation of modern dialect studies and the widespread dissemination of its findings. It is highly likely that *Suna no Utsuwa* was written while incorporating the results of the new dialect research that was being published one after another during that period. While Matsumoto Seicho was originally a novelist with an interest in dialects, it is essential to note the background of incorporating dialect-based misdirection tools in *Suna no Utsuwa*. This period also corresponds to Japan's high-growth period, which heightened dialect consciousness within Japanese society. This is a significant aspect that should not be overlooked. When analyzing the trend in the number of articles related to 'dialect' in five-year increments using the "Newspaper Articles Database on Language" from the National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics, it becomes evident that the number of reported events related to 'dialect' saw a rapid and substantial increase from 1965 to 1969. This increase coincided with the late period of Japan's high-growth period. In terms of content, numerous articles and letters related to 'dialect suicide' and 'dialect murder' emerged, indicating this was a period characterized by the stigma of dialects.

On the other hand, during this period, there was a growing trend where dialects began to be assigned to major characters in serialized newspaper novels. This suggests that *Suna no Utsuwa* can be reconsidered as one of the 'dialect newspaper serial novels' that reflected the dialect consciousness of Japan's high-growth period.

In *Suna no Utsuwa*, dialect is used as a stigma for Miki Ken'ichi, who is privy to the hidden past of Waga Eiryō. In contrast, to hide the stigma, pseudo- or quasi-standard language is employed for Waga Eiryō, who had already altered his own past. During the serialization of the novel, dialects were skillfully used as symbols of stigmas deeply intertwined with one's birth and background, something to be ashamed of and concealed. *Suna no Utsuwa* can be described as 'dialect newspaper serial novels' that reflect the

hidden aspects, such as the past or stigmas one may want to conceal, of Japan's high-growth period. It does so by using the unfamiliar Umpaku dialect, dialectal knowledge not widely known, and dialectal stereotypes from Eastern Japan.

During this period, other serialized newspaper novels with main protagonists assigned dialects include Shiba Ryotaro's *Ryoma ga Yuku* (1962 – 1966, Evening edition of *the Sankei Shimbun*) and Kawabata Yasunari's *Koto* (1961 – 1962, Morning edition of *the Asahi Shimbun*). The 'Tosa dialect' in the former is considered a representation of the 'brightness' of Japan's high-growth period, carrying the aspirations and dreams of one's homeland. Meanwhile, in the latter, the 'Kyoto dialect' symbolizes the 'vanishing beauty' of Japan, representing a bygone era.