



Article

Deciphering the Parrot's Voice: Satō Haruo's "Okāsan" ("Mother") and *Josei (Woman)* Magazine

Atsuko Nishikawa

Department of Japanese Literature, Doshisha University, Kyoto 602-8580, Japan; anishika@mail.doshisha.ac.jp

Abstract: Satō Haruo's "Okāsan" ("Mother") is a story that was published in *Josei (Woman)* magazine in October 1926. The plot follows "I" as he listens to the words of the parrot he bought from the pet store and deduces and fantasizes freely about her previous home. In this paper, I spotlight the fact that the home that "I" envisions through the voice of the parrot, Laura, corresponds to the family image that was being presented concurrently in *Josei* magazine and showcased that the ideal family was simply nothing more than an ideal. In relativizing *Josei's* familial discourse, and in this relationship between the published magazine and the story, I argue for the latter's importance.

Keywords: Japanese literature; detective short stories; Satō Haruo; motherhood; family; women; magazine; 1920s

1. Introduction

Satō Haruo's "Okāsan" ("Mother") is a story that was published in *Josei (Woman)* magazine in October 1926.¹ The plot follows "I" as he listens to the words of the parrot he bought from the pet store and deduces and fantasizes freely about her previous home. Listening to the parrot's words, "I" figures out that the parrot's name is Laura, that her previous household was wealthy with three girls and a 3- or 4-year-old boy, that the father was a high-ranking sailor on a foreign route, and so forth.

To date, this story has only been mentioned as an example of Satō Haruo's unique take on detective stories (that detective stories are nevertheless literature and therefore have to be the kind that exudes "romantic appeal") (*romanchikku na kankyō*) (Satō [1924] 1998), and there has been no extensive analysis of the story and few previous studies.² However, when we consider how this story appeared in *Josei* magazine specifically, the story acquires an important significance.

In this paper, I consider the era of *Josei* magazine that the story was published to reveal how the family life in the text that "I" envisions from the words of Laura, conforms to the idealized family image presented within the magazine. However, at the same time, the conclusion of "I's" fantasy, that Laura was replaced because her cries reminded the original owner of her lost child, and his own worry that keeping her in his childless home would cause her to lose these unique cries, imply that the "idealized family" presented by *Josei* magazine was unattainable. The fact that he uses the parrot's voice as clues to use his imagination freely, and from the fact that he observes that "to throw away words would be to throw away one's very soul", point to the fact that the story elucidates that words are not simply signs but are greatly influenced by the memory and consciousness of those who use them.

Although this work conforms to the discourse contained within *Josei*, on the other hand, it is not so much that it completely matches the image of family presented in the magazine, but instead takes a distance by showing that this image is nothing more than fantasy. Additionally, given the time period, we can think of this story as encouraging, albeit modestly, a reconsideration of Japan's Taiwanese language education system and of language in general by those who were indifferent to both/either. Only by deciphering the



Citation: Nishikawa, Atsuko. 2023. Deciphering the Parrot's Voice: Satō Haruo's "Okāsan" ("Mother") and *Josei (Woman)* Magazine. *Humanities* 12: 14. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h12010014>

Received: 30 September 2022

Revised: 21 December 2022

Accepted: 15 January 2023

Published: 20 January 2023



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story's relationship with the magazine in which it was published can this new significance and value be clarified for the first time.

2. Characteristics of *Josei* Magazine

Before analyzing “Okāsan”, I would like to review the kind of magazine that *Josei* was. *Josei* was a monthly magazine by the publisher Platonsha that was first published in May 1922 and had a total of 72 volumes until its end in May 1928. As is well-established, the 1920s was a period of rapid development of women's magazines (Ōya [1926] 1981). One after another, *Fujin kōron* / *Woman's Review* (first published in 1916), *Shufu no tomo* / *Housewife's Friend* (1917), *Fujin kurabu* / *Woman's Club* (1920), *Josei kaizō* / *Woman's Reconstruction* (1922), *Reijokai* / *Young Woman's World* (1922), and so on were published, with *Woman* being one of them (Maeda 1973; Iwami 2014). In the October 1926 issue of *Fujokai* / *Woman's World*, a “Modern Girl's Mental Test” was published, in which it listed the names of popular magazines which were, of course, *Fujokai*, but after that were *Fujin kōron*, *Shufu no tomo*, and *Josei*, from which we can surmise that *Josei* had a certain degree of popularity (Fujokai 1926). I would like to briefly compare the characteristics of popular women's magazines from similar publication periods (*Fujin Kōron*, *Shufu no tomo*, and *Josei*), setting aside *Fujokai* because it was first published earlier in 1910. These magazines are rich for comparison because of their overlapping readership and the fact that they were cognizant of their own and each other's legacies.

First, *Fujin kōron* was initially published by Chūōkōronsha as a “sister” publication to *Chūō kōron* / *Central Review* to be full of stories that were “refined and interesting” and that advocated for improving women's tastes, encouraging “a practical education that was moderate and elegant”, and rejected “new ideas that were off-beat and extreme and old ideas that were obstinate and narrow-minded” (Kurita 1968). According to scholar Ryōko Kimura in her book, *Shufu no tanjō* / “Housewife's” Birth, *Fujin kōron* was intended for a highly educated readership and was fundamentally about liberalism, advocating the expansion of women's rights and dealing with social issues (Kimura 2010). While opinion articles that discussed theories of women's liberation, women's status, and ways of life were the main part of *Fujin kōron*, there were also across paper discussions and debates about other social issues. It can be said that readers desired and read these debates on women's liberations and these articles on women's social elevation. We can see how invested the readership was in these issues in, for example, the articles solicited for a contest under the theme “my ideal home”, in the January 1923 issue of *Fujin kōron*. Here, we can see winning articles where women talk about homes where futons are set out in preparation for a dozing wife, homes where husbands take care of wives, and homes with dens where wives can study uninterrupted (Tadehana 1923; Ichioka 1923). Alternatively, there are more “big picture” articles that called for women to open their eyes and help the reform of present-day Japanese households where women have to do everything from cooking to cleaning, sewing, and child-raising and, on occasion, working a job to earn money for the household (Sazanka 1923). From these examples, we can see how even for women in the household, a change in social standing was assertively desired. However, when we consider that the contributors were equally men and women, and that some of the readers in the 1920s were men, we can ascertain that rather than just based on gender of the reader, the magazine was consumed by readers who were specifically interested in women's issues (Kimura 2010).

Additionally, in the early days, there were a certain number of male readers in the 1920s, as evidenced by the fact that the number of male and female contributors to the “Letter to the Editor” column was roughly the same (Kimura 2010).

On the other hand, *Shufu no tomo*, as indicated by its title, targeted housewives and its emphasis was predominately on practical use for everyday life. It is not that *Shufu* did not include opinion articles, but that its articles were written to be understandable by people with at least an elementary education and it was supposed to be focused on housewives lower than middle class (Kimura 2010). There were many forums dedicated

to concretely answering reader concerns from “Beauty & Hairdressing Consultation” to “Household Consultation Column for Readers”. Such “answers” varied based on questions, for example, from concrete explanations on how to properly apply face cream to deciding to be filial to your parents over continuing your education (Shufu no tomo 1925a, 1925b). With this being considered, how was *Josei* magazine? In his article “Various Aspects of the Woman Problem” published in the inaugural issue of *Josei*, well-known Meiji/Shōwa-period educator Tanimoto Tomeri establishes that while *Fujin Sekai* (*Women of the World*), *Fujokai*, and *Shufu no tomo* are household reading materials and “friends” of the housewives and while they focus on the needs of everyday life, in contrast to *Fujin kōron*, they are not striving to promote the improvement and development of women (Tanimoto 1922). On the other hand, *Josei* magazine, which published many opinion articles and stories, was conscious of its predecessors, particularly *Fujin kōron*. However, there is no official statement of publication, and the purpose and intention of its launch are unclear. The beginning of *Josei*’s inaugural issue can be seen in Figure 1.



Figure 1. The introductory page to the inaugural issue of *Josei* magazine is entitled “The Age of the Woman”, and all that is printed is the words of French sociologist Jean Finot. Scholar Koyama Shizuko points out that though *Josei* was filled with opinion articles, very few of them concerned labor issues, the abolition of licensed prostitution, or women’s movements, and argues that in contrast to *Fujin kōron*, the magazine was restricted by class and there was little interest in social movements (Koyama 1993). While at the beginning of its publication, there were many opinion articles that discussed general women’s issues, after the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923, the number of opinion articles fell, and the publication of literary works increased. Of the opinion articles that remained, Koyama points out that the articles themselves dealt primarily with how women should live their lives and consequently what kind of changes in customs and habits were occurring. Again, while *Fujin kōron* wrote about the problems of the working woman and on the necessity of having a job, in *Josei*, publications were limited to introducing this new type of woman, the professional working woman. Koyama concludes that *Josei* magazine “was the type of glamorous magazine with an urban atmosphere that took on the role of a mirror, reflecting the appearance of new types of women” (Koyama 1993).

The impression that the magazine was urban, glamorous, and new is no doubt influenced by the fact that it was published by Platonsha, a company that was started by Club Cosmetics/Nakayama Taiyōdō. Kikuchi Kan, Japanese author and founder of the publishing company Bungei Shunjū, pointed out that Platonsha was based on the wealth

of Club Cosmetics but separated itself from commercialism and in so doing, he praised *Josei* as “breaking new ground as a woman’s magazine” (Kikuchi 1925). Additionally, as a magazine that directly expressed the characteristics of “urban”, “glamour”, and “newness”, it was heavily influenced by illustrator Yama Rokurō’s cover art, which imitated the Beardsley style, and the cut-out designs of graphic designer Yamana Ayao (Tsuganesawa 1993; Yamana 2015). See Figure 1 (above) and Figure 2 (below).



Figure 2. Cover of *Josei* April 1926 issue.

While writer Azumaya Giichiro described *Fujin kōron*’s cover as “like an old lady and hard to accept as a women’s magazine for the new age”, he appraised *Josei* as modern because of its “stylish font and gold binding” (Azumaya 1925). The magazine featured many advertising pages for Club Cosmetics with sophisticated designs, was aimed at the urban middle class as symbolized by the image of the “lady” in Club Cosmetics, and actively introduced foreign literature and art. Since its inaugural issue and in every issue since, the magazine has included cover art of Western paintings and translations of Western short stories, plays, criticisms, etc.

3. Deciphering the Family Life in the Parrot’s Voice

Having briefly discussed the characteristics of *Josei* magazine, I would like to move on to analyzing the story, “Okāsan”. As mentioned previously, “Okāsan” is a story wherein “I” listens to the parrot, Laura, and deduces and fantasizes about her previous family life. However, how exactly does “I” deduce this information? First, let us look at the process.

At first, as “I” watches Laura “twist her body and press her big, round beak towards her chest” and as she lets out a “I’m Laura!”, he thinks to himself that the parrot sounds like she was “putting on the voice of a 35-year-old woman” (Satō [1926] 1998, p. 423). Although “I” hears from the man at the pet store that Laura is a male, he says, “because of her voice and gestures, I really could only think of her as a female”, and from then on, only talks about Laura as “she” not “he” (Satō [1926] 1998, p. 423). In this way, to “I”, Laura is not simply a parrot, but exists as a trigger and source for “I” to fantasize specifically about her previous family—a family different than his own.

Let us follow his process a little more. Additionally, “I” discovers that Laura does an uncanny impression of a child’s cry, sings nursery songs, calls him “mother” in various ways, delights in being talked to by the neighborhood children, is a man-hater who refuses to get used to the men in the house including “I” and his student-boarder, never speaks in

a man's voice, barks and crows and mimics a person calling a dog or a rooster, eats apples, and so on.

鶏がゐて、子犬がゐて、三十四五ぐらゐの少し肥えた奥さんが子どもをいくたりか育ててゐる——子供は？いくたりだらう。どこか東京近郊の静かな場所で、さうしてその家庭には男はゐない。けれども賑やかな家庭である。ロオラは笑うことを知つてゐる。よく笑ふ。調子はづれな声で出鱈目を歌つては、はしやぐ。

「オカアサン」——O'Kasan.

「オカアサン」——Oka'san.

「オカアサン」——Okasa'n.

「ホ、ホ、ホ、ホ」

かういふのを聞くとわたしは、三人の女の子がお母さんと一緒にロオラの真鍮の籠を取囲んで、口々にいろいろな呼び方の「オカアサン」をロオラに言はせてみんなして笑ひ興ずる縁側のありさまを、空想することができるのです。

——しかし、この家にはお母さんばかりゐてお父さんはゐない。お父さんはゐないけれども赤ん坊がゐるのです。——三つか精々四つぐらゐの「ボーヤ」で、それが時折、泣き出すのです……（佐藤春夫「オカアサン」）

So, there's a rooster, a dog, a 34- or 35-year-old slightly plump mother raising some number of children—children? Surely numerous. Somewhere in a quiet place in the outskirts of Tokyo and in that family, there are no men. Yet, it is a thriving family. I know that Laura laughs. She laughs often. She has fun and sings nonsense out-of-tune.

「オカアサン」——O'Kasan.

「オカアサン」——Oka'san.

「オカアサン」——Okasa'n.

「ホ、ホ、ホ、ホ」 /Ho, Ho, Ho, Ho

When I hear stuff like this, I can imagine the spectacle of the three girls and their mom crowding together around Laura's brass cage and encouraging her to say "mother" in various ways and laughing and amusing themselves on the porch.

But in this house, the mother is always there but the father is never there. There is no father, but there is a baby. A three- at most four-year old baby boy who starts crying from time to time. (Satō [1926] 1998, p. 426)

In this way, "I", from just a little information, can concretely imagine the kind of family that Laura had. Next, what I would like to pay particular attention to here is his consideration of his wife with respect to the child-like cries.

子供の泣き真似や、また出任せの歌などがひどく彼女を喜ばせました。さうして初めはそんな鳥などを買つた事に不平をこぼしたくせに、もうそんな事はすっかり忘れてしまつたらしいのです（——彼女、わたしの妻には子供がなかつたのです。時々それをさびしかるやうな事を言ふことがあります。）

要するにロオラのきれぎれな言葉はわたしには一つの家庭を思わせたし、わたしの妻には子供たちの生活を思はせたのです。（佐藤春夫「オカアサン」）

When she cried like a child or sang her nonsense songs, it filled [my wife] with delight. Therefore, even though she had initially complained that I had purchased this bird, it was as if she had completely forgot about the whole thing (she, my wife, did not have any children. And every now and then she would say things that made me think she was lonely).

In short, Laura's bits and pieces made me imagine a certain family and, for my wife, made her imagine a life of children. (Satō [1926] 1998, p. 426)

In his family, there are no children. Because of that, “I” thinks that his wife is lonely. This work is based on first-person narration, and because everything is told through “I”, anybody’s thoughts (i.e., the wife) outside of “I” is unknown; “I” perceives his wife’s childlessness as loneliness and dissatisfaction. He has even described it as follows: “As I explained, for me, Laura transformed a family I cannot see, but whose heart I saw clearly into my neighbors and for my wife, she fulfilled her motherhood by allowing her to imagine a flock of children” (Satō [1926] 1998, p. 429)

Laura is satisfying his wife’s sense of motherhood. That is to say, that without Laura, “I” thinks that he is unable to fulfill her motherhood in their family as it is currently. In this way, the fact that they are childless shows that his present family is deficient.

To perceive childlessness as a deficiency or to think that motherhood is innate to women is abundantly visible in *Josei* magazine, in which “Okāsan” is published.

For example, the manga “Love” (“Ai”) published in the inaugural issue of *Josei* magazine, is accompanied by the text “While children’s cries used to be irritating, once I had my own children, I started to feel compassion for even the tear-stricken children on the street” (Shimizu 1922, p. 128). See Figure 3.



Figure 3. The manga “Love”.

It is easy to see that motherhood is revered. In a special edition of *Josei* called “Apologize to Children”, there were confessional articles about not having treated children as precious, including Miyake Yasuko’s “Unlovable Sadness” (“Aishienu kanashimi”) and Kuriyagawa Chōko “Children Before Mothers” (“Haha yori kodomotachi ni”) (July 1925 issue of *Josei*). In the “Editor’s Postscript”, they write “I sincerely hope that it will be read with close attention, especially by women” (*Josei* 1925). Additionally, for example, there was a survey “What should I do if I have a child?” (“Moshi watashi ni ko ga attara nani suruka”) in the June 1923 issue of *Josei* magazine which presented thoughts about respecting the value of motherhood. Additionally, there was an article by Hiratsuka Raichō called “The Modern Woman Who Has Been Overlooked by Life” (“Seimei kara mihanasure tsutsuaru gendai no josei”) in which she writes, “At present, if not only women, but male society were to lose sight of the value of motherhood, mankind would have lost a lot” (Hiratsuka 1924). In there, she also claims that rather than preserving the old-fashioned feudal family system with the patriarch at the top which has existed since the Meiji period, from now on, the women’s movement should ensure that “the brilliance of motherhood permeates every aspect of life” (Hiratsuka 1924). Additionally, what is particularly worth noting is that there were articles scattered throughout which, while introducing foreign

(read: Western) literature and art, also presented scenes of mother and child as an ideal home. For example, Rembrandt's painting of the Madonna was introduced as a representation of a mother's deep love for children, (in June 1923 issue) and in the May 1923 issue, Suita Junsuke discussed the glorification of motherhood in German expressionist literature, concluding that the significance of motherhood cannot be ignored in any discussion about women (Suita 1923). Finally, we see this further in, for example, Feminist writer Kamichika Ichiko's September 1924 article, "On Grasping the Ideal" ("Risō no haji ni yoru"), using the example of an ancient Roman woman who described her children as "treasures", she writes, "when women are allowed to enjoy the company of children freely and comfortably, it is exactly in this moment that, for women, they are in the presence of heaven (Kamichika 1924). In essence, we see that the magazine promoted an ideal home as one where mothers exist with children.

The loneliness that "I" describes his wife as experiencing thus conforms to the kind of presentation of women that is in *Josei* magazine, and it can be said that the readers could relate to the childless wife's feelings.

One more point I would like to touch upon is that the family that Laura lived with before did not just have children but is one in which "I" imagines that the high-ranking sailor father is always absent.

お母さんがゐて、子供たちがゐる。それも二三人、しかもきつと口をきけるほどの幼子までゐる。このお母さんはどうしたつて未亡人ではない。未亡人だとするとまだ新しい未亡人だけれども、その人のものらしい賑やかな笑い声や、また子供たちのはしやぎ方のなかには新らしく主人を失った家らしい影は少しもないのです。それにもし主人を新らしく失ったといふだけなら、ロオラは、その主人の—— 男の声をもう少しは言つてもいいだらうし、その声を話さないまでも、もう少し男に馴れてゐていいわけですから。「ロオラや」という気取つた声をする夫人はきつと未亡人などではありませんまい。(略)

船員！ 外国航路の高級船員の留守宅！ ふと思ひ浮んだ自分の直覚にわたしは非常に満足したのです。(略) ともかくも留守宅は有福に暮してゐるのです。(略)

時たま帰る主人は子供たちを愛し奥さんを愛するのに忙しいので、鸚鵡などは相手にしないのです。(佐藤春夫「オカアサン」)

There is a mother, there are children. There are two or three of them as well as a young child who can surely speak. The mother is by no means a widow. If she were a widow, she would be a new one, but there is not a hint of loss in her unique, lively laughter, and the playfulness of the children. If they had just recently lost the husband, Laura would be able to say, even just a little bit, in the husband's voice or even if she could not, she would be more used to men. The strange lady's voice that she uses to say "I'm Laura!" is surely not the voice of a widow or anything like that [...]

A sailor! The empty home of a high ranking sailor on a foreign route! I was extremely pleased with my sudden intuition [...] In any case, they live affluently while he is away [...]

Because he only returns from time to time, the husband is too busy showing love to his children and wife to deal with something like a parrot. (Satō [1926] 1998, pp. 427–28)

To explain the father's absence, "I" imagines that the home is one of a high-ranking sailor. A wealthy and loving family that lives in a quiet neighborhood outside of Tokyo. The parrot was a souvenir from the husband's time abroad. When we think of *Josei* magazine as one that is glamorous and modern and frequently introduces foreign literature and culture, here too, the family that "I" imagines is the sort that would be dreamed of by the readers of *Josei*, so we can see how the image in the magazine and this family matches. As represented by the words of Kuriyagawa Chōko who once said, "As a wife who is satisfied by her husband's love, and as a mother who has experienced the joy of holding a cute

child in her arms for the first time, is a woman who truly shines with feminine beauty” (Kuriyagawa 1923), it is difficult to imagine a happy home (or a happy mother/wife) without a father. Therefore, “I” fantasizes that the father is absent due to his work. He no doubt imagines a high-ranking sailor because it would account for being away from home for long periods of time while being exposed to foreign (esp. Western) culture. On the cover of the volume of *Josei* magazine that contained “Okāsan”, we can see the kind of reverence towards Western cultures in the sailing ship and the woman’s Western clothing (Figure 4). Following the sailing ship theme, the issue also includes a painting of a sailing ship accompanied by Rabindranath Tagore’s poem. The July 1926 issue cover is also adorned with a “Mediterranean Sailing Ship”/“Chichūkai no Hansen”. These are just some of the many examples that make clear how ships were a favorite motif in *Josei* magazine. *Josei* not only introduced Western culture and art, but also specifically the lives of overseas women in small special features called, for example, “Women in Various Countries”/“Kakkoku no onna” (October 1924 issue) (Josei 1924) and “A Mediterranean Journey”/“Chichūkai yūki” (Ōtani 1926) (the latter was published in multiple issues including the one that contained “Okāsan”) which expressed admiration for foreign, especially Western, culture.

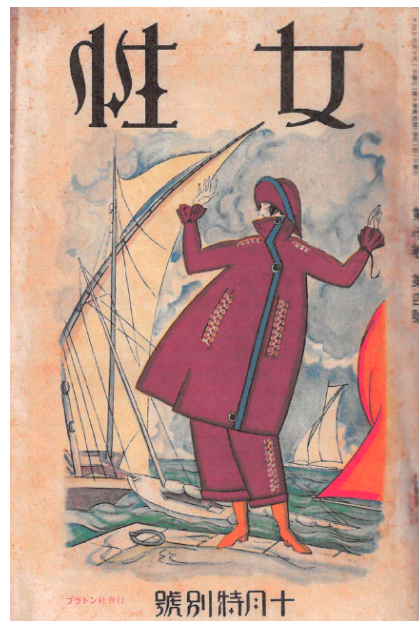


Figure 4. The cover of the October 1926 issue of *Josei* magazine.

In this way, regarding the information that “I” deduces about Laura’s previous family, while filling him with a sense of lack in his family, we can see how it was the kind of idealized family that was revered by the readers of *Josei*. However, his deduction does not simply end with the imagining of an idealized home. Ultimately, we are left with the puzzle of why it is that this kind of fulfilling environment would give Laura to a pet store and exchange her for another bird. In that moment, “I” imagines that the “wife of his fantasy loses her darling child”. He concludes that it must have been the young boy. He reasons that since Laura’s cries mimic the sounds of the youngest child, the mother, being unable to bear the reminder of her sweet child, gave her up. Thus, the story ends with the following fantasy:

ロオラはわたしの家に来てからもう二月になります。(略)わたしはロオラを愛してゐます。さうしてロオラも追々とわたしになついて来ます。ただわたしが時々心配することは、ロオラが完全にわたしたちの家庭になつた頃には、わたしの家には子供がゐないのだから、ロオラは子供の真似を忘れてしまひ、しかもそのころになつてわたしの想像する寂しい夫人は、年月とともに愛児を失つた真実の悲しみが少しづつうすらぐとともに、せめてはその児のなつかし

い追憶のために、その子の声に生きうつしのロオラに会いたいと思ひはしないだらうかといふことです。（佐藤春夫「オカアサン」）

It has been almost two months since Laura came to the house. [...] I love Laura. And Laura has gotten used to me, little by little. But every now and then I worry that when Laura becomes completely used to my own home, that because we have no children, she will lose her ability to mimic a child's cries and around that time, I started wondering too if the lonely wife that I imagined, after the years had lessened the genuine sorrow that she felt for her lost child, would start to feel nostalgic and want to meet Laura, in whom resides her child's living voice. (Satō [1926] 1998, pp. 430–31)

As time passes, neither “I” nor his wife will be able to hear the sound of children which filled the void of their home and provided them comfort. The family that “I” imagines who lost their child will be unable to recover the voice of the child that they love. “I” destroys the fantasy of this ideal family and soon, even he will be unable to fill the lack and the loneliness that stems from it.

In other words, what the short story shows in “I’s” process of deduction compels the readers of *Josei* magazine to imagine the idealized family presented within the story and the magazine itself and ultimately suggests that such a family is not achievable and only exists as an aspiration.

4. Deciphering the “Voice”

The deduction that unfolds in “Okāsan” is not just fantasy but is a trivial matter; however, when we consider the kind of articles that are published in *Josei* magazine, it is clear that it is trying to distance itself from the image of an idealized family that the magazine tries to evoke in the readers.

Nevertheless, the significance of the short story is not limited to the points mentioned above. When we consider that the title is “Okāsan” and the process of deduction arises from the words of Laura, we can see that the story is paying special attention to the relationship between words and those who use them.

In the work, “I” does not only deduce information about Laura’s previous family, but presents the following kind analysis of the word “mother”:

それにしてもロオラが、「ママ」と言はずに「オカアサン」と呼ぶところがわたしには此上なくうれしいのです。一体わたしは、近ごろのわが国のすこし程度の高い家庭で父母のことを呼ばせて「パパ」「ママ」をもつてすることには非常に反対なのです。（略）——われわれ自身が幼いころに言ひなれたあのなつかしい「お父さん」「お母さん」といふ言葉をすてて、何を好んで、どんな理由があつて、その子供たちに「パパ」「ママ」などとは言はせなければならないのでせう。（略）言葉を捨てるといふことは心を捨てることなのです。（略）子供たちがその生涯の最初の機会に最も感動して叫び、さうしてそれ故一生最も深い印象を持つ筈の第一の言葉を、外国の言葉で叫ぶなどといふことは全く許し難い事だとさへわたしは言ひたいのです。（佐藤春夫「オカアサン」）

Regardless, the fact that Laura says “mother” [okāsan] instead of “mama” pleased me to no end. In fact, I am very much opposed to the recent trend in our country of moderately upper class families calling their parents “papa” and “mama” [...] Finally, I could not understand for whatever rhyme or reason, why they would throw away those nostalgic words “mother” [okāsan] and “father” [otōsan] that I had become used to since I myself was young and force children to say “papa” or “mama” [...] To throw away words would be to throw away one’s very soul [...] I would even say that for the word that children scream most passionately at life’s first opportunity, the first word which leaves the deepest impression for the rest of their lives, to be a foreign word is utterly unforgivable. (Satō [1926] 1998, p. 428)

“I” criticizes the use of foreign words such as “papa” and “mama”, stating that “to throw away words would be to throw away one’s very soul”. Although the husband is a sailor on a foreign route and is naturally exposed to the atmosphere of foreign countries, the fact that he imagines that they say “mother” instead of “papa” and “mama” is something that he “feels is admirable on the part of the family and the mother”.

In fact, even in contemporary newspapers, encouraging children to say “papa-san” and “mama-san” was fashionable, and there were even contributed articles that considered it strange, for example, in the article “Papa and Mama” (“Papa to mama”) in the morning edition of *Yomiuri Shinbun* on 7 September 1922 (Yomiuri 1922). In the same issue of *Josei* in which “Okāsan” appears, in the story “Difficulty Reading Lips”/“Dokushin’nan” by Sasaki Mosaku, even the protagonist uses the trendier word when he asks a child, “Hello, where’s your mama?” (Sasaki 1926). A little later, in 1934, the Minister of Education Matsuda Genji called for the use of titles such as “mother” and “father” rather than “papa” and “mama”, which stirred up a debate (Yomiuri 1934). While the usage of “mother” and “father” were originally middle-class households in Tokyo, it became standardized in 1904 with the *Jinjō shōgaku yomihon*, a national language textbook for elementary schools (Shimizu 1987). Considering its rapid spread and establishment, the endorsement and feeling of “nostalgia” that “I” feels for “mother”, at a glance, can be seen as an expression of nationalist consciousness. However, “I” continues as follows after the previously quoted section:

台湾では台湾籍民の子供たちに小学校内で土語を使ふことを厳禁し、時にはこれを犯したものに鞭を与へた事実さへあつたといふのに、それほど国民と国語との權威を知つてゐる為政者なら、何故、今日中流以上の日本人の子供たちがパパ、ママと呼ぶことを厳禁し処罰しないのでせう（佐藤春夫「オカアサン」）

In Taiwan, children of Taiwanese nationality are strictly prohibited from using their native language in school, and sometimes those who violate this were whipped, and yet if you are a politician who seemingly understands the power of people and language, why is it that today’s middle class Japanese children are not strictly prohibited from calling their parents “papa” and “mama”. (Satō [1926] 1998, p. 428)

Here, despite the fact that Taiwanese children in Taiwan are prevented from speaking their native language in schools to the point that sometimes they are whipped raises disbelief that certain measures are not implemented in Japan itself for “I”. The “politicians” who try to forcibly teach words, the “politicians” who take different positions in Taiwan and domestically and the world that is ignorant of this fact. “I” is responding sarcastically to all of this. In fact, Satō Haruo wrote a story, “Musha”, based on his experience traveling in Taiwan in 1920 that is about the conditions of Japanese language education in Taiwanese schools. There, he describes how the Taiwanese children are taught that “Tokyo is the biggest city in Japan” and “The greatest person in Japan is His Majesty the Emperor”, but that when the children are asked “Who is the greatest person in Japan” they respond “Tokyo”. To this, Satō expresses his feeling of dissatisfaction with the way in which Japanese language is forcibly taught to Taiwanese children when he writes “They are being taught concepts of a kind unimaginable in their world. The pain of the teacher and the student are worthy of more than sympathy” (Satō [1925] 1998, p. 126).

Words are not just symbols that point to things. The memory and thoughts cling to the words of those who use them. In “Okāsan”, “I” is conscious of this. It is precisely for this reason that “I” listens to the specific intonation that Laura uses to say “mother”, superimposes his own thoughts, and tries to convey this to the reader. So long as media such as magazines and stories are based on letters, it will be difficult to convey “voice”. However, “I” tries to reproduce this voice and express the fact that words are not transparent symbols but are linked with thoughts. In the text, the fact that the word “Okāsan” is rendered in katakana (usually symbolizing foreign-ness) is instead to emphasize that the parrot’s words are voiced. It was meant to encourage the readers to think about how “I” listens to this

voice and imagines it. Of course, it is not possible to reproduce the voice that “I” heard. Again, as time passes, the “voice” of Laura will change, as will, no doubt, the memory of “I”. Originally, since the “voice” that “I” hears from the parrot itself is only given meaning by “I’s” arbitrary interpretation, it is impossible to reproduce. However, given that the story tries to “voice” in a medium of letters by describing the memories and thoughts of the life behind it and given that at the same time such a relationship was ignored by Japan’s Taiwan language policy, is it not possible to think that the story, albeit modestly, encourages its readers to reconsider? Finally, at the same time, we can also consider how this is a kind of hidden irony for readers who easily admire the image of Western culture evoked by *Josei* magazine without thinking deeply about the ideas behind the words.

5. Conclusions

In this paper, I have reconsidered “Okāsan”, a story which had up until now been taken simply as one of Satō Haruo’s detective stories, and its relationship to the magazine in which it was published, and thus clarified a new aspect of this story. In other words, while, on the one hand, this story followed and distanced itself from the idealized familial discourse contained within *Josei* magazine, it also expressed an unease with Japan’s Taiwan language policy and the need to modestly question those who were indifferent to this policy and the relationship between people and language. Thus, I have presented a new significance for this story. In the 1920s, many women’s magazines were published and read and many of them were stories. At the time, readers did not simply read one story but the whole magazine, and in many cases, the magazine was read with pleasure. In the same issue in which “Okāsan” appears, several other short stories, including the aforementioned one by Sasaki Mosaku, are published. Sasaki’s “Difficulty Reading Lips” is a story about a man who is friends with his wife who misreads her facial expression as an invitation and finds out that in reality she was making that expression to communicate with her mute child, and it was thus proof that she was a woman full of maternal love instead. There is also a short article praising mother’s love by Yamada Junko called “Strong is a Mother’s Love” / “Tsuyoki ha haha no ai” (Yamada 1926) and it is clear from this and the Sasaki short story that they are in line with the kind of idealized household that we see in “Okāsan”. Of course, not all of the short stories and articles in the magazine are related to this image of idealized family pushed by *Josei* magazine, but when we consider “Difficulty in Reading Lips” together with “Okāsan” we can see its significance as a critique much more clearly. It is impossible to divorce the story from the magazine (the context) in which it was published, and it is this importance that this article establishes.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Acknowledgments: The author thanks Yasmine Krings for translating the manuscript from Japanese to English.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

¹ All translations from Japanese to English were done by the translator: Yasmine Krings.

² For example, in Edogawa Ranpo’s essay “Oni no kotoba” (Words of a Demon) briefly introduces Satō Haruo’s “Okāsan” as an “intellectual detective story” (Edogawa [1936] 2005).

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