



Linguistic Features and Conversational Functions of the Tosa Dialect in Gintama

Julia^{1*}, Rani Arfianty²

Japanese literature, Faculty of Cultural Studies, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

email: julia18205@gmail.com¹, rani.arfianty@usu.ac.id

*) Corresponding Author

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Abstract

This study examines the linguistic forms and conversational functions of the Tosa dialect as represented in the anime Gintama. Originating from Kochi Prefecture, the Tosa dialect preserves elements of ancient Western Japanese in both phonology and vocabulary, contributing to its distinct linguistic character. In Gintama, the dialect is used to construct character identity and highlight regional background, particularly for figures modeled after historical personalities from Tosa. Drawing on qualitative and descriptive methods, this study analyzed dialogues spoken by characters who use the Tosa dialect across several episodes. The analysis identifies seventeen dialectal forms, including grammatical variations such as ~yuu, ~chuu, ~ki, and ~jaki, and explores their pragmatic roles in expressing aspect, negation, emphasis, and causality. The findings reveal how dialectal variation contributes to characterization and authenticity in Japanese popular media. Despite notable differences from standard Japanese, the contextual use of the Tosa dialect in Gintama allows viewers to infer meaning and appreciate the cultural and linguistic diversity it represents.

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✉ Alamat korespondensi:

Gedung B4 Lantai 2 FBS Unnes

Kampus Sekaran, Gunungpati, Semarang, 50229

E-mail: chie@unnes.ac.id

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INTRODUCTION

Dialect is a linguistic variation used by particular speech communities that differs in certain features from other varieties of the same language, while remaining mutually intelligible among speakers (Nur, Abdul, & Fernandez, 2005, as cited in Prananda, 2023). According to Nugrawiyati (2016, as cited in Nuramila, 2023), language variation arises from the diversity of speakers across wide geographical areas. Japanese also exhibits a wide range of regional dialects, known as *hōgen*, which differ from standard Japanese (*hyōjungo*) in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. *Hyōjungo* serves as the common or standard variety used in formal communication and official writing, and it represents the national standard of the Japanese language (Sudjianto & Dahihi, 2009, as cited in Arfiansyah, 2025).

Dialectal variation emerges from the communicative needs of particular regions or social groups, resulting in the development of distinctive local speech patterns (Prayudi & Nasution, 2020, as cited in Zane & Andini, 2023). Each dialect exhibits unique vocabulary, pronunciation, and intonation that distinguish it from standard Japanese. For example, the standard Japanese word *asoko* (“there”) appears as *asuko* in the Tottori dialect and *akko* in the Hiroshima dialect, reflecting phonological and lexical differences shaped by regional linguistic evolution.

In addition, many Japanese words change in meaning across dialects. For instance, the verb *nageru* means “to throw” in standard Japanese, but in the Hokkaidō dialect it carries the meaning “to discard.” Such semantic variation illustrates how regional dialects preserve distinctive linguistic identities within the broader framework of the Japanese language.

Language variation in Japan has been extensively studied, particularly in relation to well-known dialects such as the Kansai dialect, which frequently appears in both media and sociolinguistic research. Several studies have examined its usage, including “*The Use of Kansai Dialect in Episode 651 of Detective Conan*” by Raversa (2016), “*Funsgi Shuujoshi Dialek Kansai*

dalam Film Setoutsumi” by Wipayana (2021), and “*The Perspectives of Native Kansai Dialect Speakers Towards the Kansai Dialect and Standard Japanese*” by Raihan (2023). Other research has explored varieties within the Kansai dialect group, such as the Osaka dialect in Rafika’s (2018) “*Osaka-Ben dalam Anime Detective Conan the Movie: Karakurenai No Raburetta*” and the Mie dialect in Pudat’s (2025) “*Representation of the Mie Dialect in Japanese Popular Media: A Linguistic Analysis of Yatogame-chan Kansatsu Nikki*.”

However, some regional dialects—such as the Tosa dialect (*Tosa-ben*) spoken in the eastern part of Kōchi Prefecture—have received far less academic attention compared to more prominent varieties like Kansai or Osaka dialects. The present study focuses on the Tosa dialect and its linguistic characteristics as used in contemporary media. An example of several Tosa dialect expressions is presented in the table below:

Table 1. Example of Tosa dialect

No.	Standard Japanese	Tosa Dialect	Meaning
1.	一日 (ichinichi)	ひいとい (hiitoui)	One day
2.	まっこと (makkoto)	ほんとう に (hontou ni)	Really

An article titled *Tosa-ben*, published in *TosaWave: An Information Magazine for the International Community in Kōchi*, provides an overview of the dialect’s origins, its relation to the neighboring Hata dialect (*Hata-ben*), its grammatical characteristics, and examples of common expressions with explanations of their use. According to Sato Keiko, as cited in the *TosaWave* article (Kochi International Association, 2010), several characteristic grammatical features of the Tosa dialect are summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Grammar in Tosa Dialect

	Standard Japanese	Tosa Dialect
Present progressive	~teiru	~yuu
Condition/result	~teiru	~chuu

Negative	~nai	~n
Reason	~kara	~ki
Question	~no?	~ga?
Emphasis	~ndesu (~nda)	~ga

In addition, several older forms of Tosa-ben are rarely used today but are often found in films and television dramas, as explained in the TosaWave feature on the dialect (Kochi International Association, 2010).

Table 3. Old Tosa Dialect

Old Tosa Dialect	Standard Japanese	English
~zeyo	~desu	is
~tose	~shite kudasai	Please
~jaki	~dakara	That's why
~tsuka	~desuka	Is it?
Chikuto~	Chotto~	A moment
Geni makkoto	Jitsu ni hontou ni	Really
Nan tsuka!	Nan datte!	What! Really?

The use of the Tosa dialect can be observed in the anime *Gintama*, a science fiction comedy series with *jidaigeki* (historical drama) elements created by Sorachi Hideaki. The story portrays the lives of samurai in Edo after the city has been conquered by aliens. Several characters are modeled after real historical figures, including Sakamoto Tatsuma, who is based on Sakamoto Ryōma, a political reformer from the Tosa domain during the Bakumatsu period. The following example illustrates how the Tosa dialect is used in Sakamoto's dialogue.:

坂本： なんかズキズキするのう、昨日飲みすぎたきに。

Sakamoto: *Nanka zuki zuki suru nou, kinou nomi sugita ki ni.* (My head is throbbing; guess I drank too much yesterday)

The lines above would become like this in standard Japanese:

なんかズキズキするなあ、昨日飲みすぎたから。

Nanka zuki zuki suru naa, kinou nomi sugita kara.

As shown in the comparison above, the Tosa dialect differs noticeably from standard Japanese, particularly in the use of the

suffix *~kini* ("because"), which corresponds to *~dakara* in standard Japanese. Such distinctions can make it challenging for listeners unfamiliar with the dialect to fully grasp its meaning. Therefore, this study focuses on the use of the Tosa dialect in the anime *Gintama* and aims to: (1) identify how the linguistic forms of the Tosa dialect differ from standard Japanese, and (2) analyze the communicative functions of these forms within conversational contexts.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach based on textual data from the anime *Gintama*. According to Bogdan and Taylor (as cited in Tabrani, 2023), qualitative research produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words and observable behaviors. It emphasizes understanding phenomena in their natural settings, using methods such as observation, interviews, and document analysis (Subandi, 2011).

Descriptive research, as defined by Rukajat (2018, as cited in Komalasari, 2024), aims to depict realistic and contemporary phenomena systematically, factually, and accurately. It involves constructing detailed illustrations of characteristics and relationships among variables. The descriptive qualitative method relies on categorization to interpret social or linguistic patterns and serves as an effective alternative to other research approaches (Sandelowski, 2000, as cited in Furidha, 2023).

In this study, character dialogues containing the Tosa dialect were transcribed using the Simak Bebas Libat Cakap (SBLC) technique, a non-participant observation method proposed by Zaim (2014, as cited in Wiyatasari & Utomo, 2022), in which the researcher listens without taking part in the conversation. After transcription, the data were filtered to distinguish dialectal utterances from standard Japanese. The identified instances of the Tosa dialect were then categorized according to their linguistic forms. Following the analytical procedure of Tanzil (2020) in her study of the Osaka dialect, each form was further examined

for its communicative and discourse functions within conversational context.

The primary data for this research were taken from selected episodes of the anime Gintama, while secondary data included previous studies on the Tosa dialect and other Japanese regional dialects. The list of analyzed episodes is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Episode List

Episode No.	Title	Release Date
23	困った時は笑って け笑ってけ	2006-09-12
232	忘れっぽい奴は忘 れた頃にやってくる	2011-10-31
233	宇宙ブルルン滞在 記	2011-11-07
234	バックは常に5千 万入るようにあけ ておけ	2011-11-14
320	ヅラ	2017-01-29

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis identified and categorized various forms and functions of the Tosa dialect as used by characters in Gintama. In this study, form refers to linguistic elements such as particles or affixes that differ grammatically from their equivalents in standard Japanese. *Function* refers to the communicative role each form serves within interaction—such as expressing negation, emphasis, suggestion, or causality. The following sections present the identified Tosa dialect forms along with explanations of their respective functions in context.

Tosa Dialect Forms and Function

1. ～ゆう

坂本： ほう、完全に闇に溶けてしもうた、幻の傭兵部族とはようゆうたもんじや。

Sakamoto: *Hou, kanzen ni yami ni tokete shimouta, maboroshi no youhei buzoku to wa you*

yuuta mon ja. (Oh, they vanished into darkness, it's well said to call them the phantom mercenary tribe)

陸奥： 感心しゆう場合か。

Mutsu: *Kanshin shiyuu baai ka.* (Now is not the time to be impressed)

The conversation above takes place between Sakamoto and Mutsu, the captain and vice-captain of a merchant fleet. Although they hold a hierarchical relationship, their speech remains informal, reflecting mutual familiarity and long-standing friendship. This dialogue occurs after they witness a spaceship disappear into the darkness. In this exchange, the Tosa dialect form ~*yu* appears, corresponding to ~*teiru* in standard Japanese. The ~*yu* form functions as a verb ending used in the present tense to describe an ongoing action or state.

2. ～ちゅう

陸奥： どうやら、バカ艦長に愛想が尽きて謀反を起こしたわけじゃなさそうじや。

Mutsu: *Douyara, baka kanchou ni aiso ga tsukite muhou o okoshita wake ja nasasou ja.* (It doesn't look like they started a rebellion because they got fed up with you, stupid captain)

坂本： やつらの船でなにが起きちゅうか？

Sakamoto: *Yatsura no fune de nani ga okichuu ka?* (What's happening on their ship?)

This exchange between Sakamoto and Mutsu occurs after their ship is unexpectedly attacked by an allied vessel. Both characters express confusion, as the incident does not appear to stem from an act of betrayal. In this dialogue, the Tosa dialect form ~*chuu* appears, corresponding to ~*teiru* in standard Japanese, similar to the form ~*yu*. The distinction lies in their aspectual nuance: ~*yu* marks actions or situations currently in progress, whereas ~*chuu* indicates actions that have occurred but whose effects or states continue into the present.

3. ～ちよる

坂本： 決めた！わしは宇宙に行くぜよ。このまま地べたはいずり回って、天人と

戦ったところで先は見えちよる。わしらがこうしちよる間にも、天人はじゃんじゃん地球に来ちよるきに。押しよせる時代の波にはさからえんぜよ。

Sakamoto: *Kimeta! Washi wa sora ni yuku ze yo. Kono mama jibeta haizuri mawatte, amanto to tatakatta tokoro de saki wa miechoru. Washi ra ga kou shi choru aida ni mo, amanto wa jan jan chikyuu ni kichoru ki ni. Oshiyoseru jidai no nami ni wa sakaraen ze yo.* (I've made up my mind! I'm going to space. Even if I stay on earth, keep crawling around and fighting the Amanto, I can see what's going to happen next. Even while we're doing this, the Amanto keep coming. We can't go against the tide of times)

The lines above are spoken by Sakamoto as he shares his thoughts with a close friend. The Tosa dialect form *~choru* appears in this dialogue and corresponds to *~teiru* in standard Japanese. Similar to *~chuu*, the *~choru* form indicates an action or state that has already occurred but continues into the present.

4. ~ちよった

坂本： なんじゃ、気持ちよく寝ちよったのに、もうフライトの時間かや？

Sakamoto: *Nan ja, kimochi yoku nechotta no ni, mou furaito no jikan kaya?* (What's wrong? I was having a nice nap, is it already time for the flight?)

These lines are spoken by Sakamoto after being abruptly awakened from a nap. In this dialogue, the Tosa dialect form *~chotta* appears, which corresponds to *~teita* in standard Japanese. The verb ending *~chotta* is the past tense form of the Tosa dialect *~chuu* and is used in the past perfect aspect to indicate completed actions or events.

5. ~ん

陸奥： おい、坂本。大丈夫なのか？いったいやつはなにものじゃ。

Mutsu: *Oi, Sakamoto. Daijoubu nano ka? Ittai yatsu wa nani mono ja.* (Hey, Sakamoto. Are you sure it is alright? Who is he?)

坂本： なんも心配はいらん。お互い、腹の中は見せ合ったきに。

Sakamoto: *Nan mo shinpai wa iran. Otagai, hara no naka wa miseatta ki ni.* (Don't worry, we both have spilled our guts)

This conversation takes place after Sakamoto makes a business deal with a suspicious man, prompting Mutsu to question whether the arrangement is trustworthy. In this dialogue, the Tosa dialect form *~n* appears, corresponding to *~nai* in standard Japanese. The *~n* suffix functions as a negative marker, used to form the negative tense of verbs.

6. ~せん

銀時： なにしてんだ、てめえは！

坂本： 気にせんで、おまんはおまんて暴れちよき、わしにはわしの暴れ方ちゅうもんがある。

Gintoki: *Nani shiten da temee wa!* (What the hell are you doing!)

Sakamoto: *Ki ni sen de, oman wa oman de abare choki, washi ni wa washi no abare kata chuu mon ga aru.* (Don't mind me. Keep doing things your way, I have my own way of going wild)

The conversation above takes place between Sakamoto and Gintoki. In this scene, Sakamoto uses the Tosa dialect form *~sen* to justify his actions in response to Gintoki's complaint. The *~sen* form corresponds to either *~shinai* or *~dekinai* in standard Japanese and functions as a negative verb ending used to express prohibition or the inability to perform an action.

7. ~き

陸奥： いかん、雲が動き出しちゅう。急げ！はやくせんと手遅れになるき！

Mutsu: *Ikan, kumo ga ugoki dashichuu. Isoge! Hayaku sen to te okure ni naru ki!* (It's not good, the clouds have already started moving. Hurry up! Or else it will be too late!)

The above lines are commands given by Mutsu to her crew members; therefore, formal language is not used. In this dialogue, the Tosa dialect form *~ki* appears, which corresponds to *~kara* in standard Japanese. The *~ki* form functions as a conjunction expressing cause and effect or reason within the sentence.

8. ~きに

坂本： そうじゃ、わしらこの船使ってデカい商いやっちよる。色んな星々回って、品物ば売り買いしちよる、まあ、貿易じゃ。じゃが、近頃宇宙は物騒じゃきに。こうして武装もしちよるわけぜよ。

Sakamoto: *Sou ja, washira kono fune tsukatte dekai akinai yacchoru. Ironna hoshi boshi mawatte, shinamono ba uri kai shi choru, maa, boueki ja. Ja ga, chikagoro uchuwa wa bussou ja ki ni. Kou shite bussou mo shi choru wake ze yo.* (That's right, we are using this ship to run a large business. We travelling around various planets, buying and selling products. In other words, we are traders. But recently, space has gotten dangerous, so that's why we've armed ourselves like these as a self-protective measure)

The lines above show Sakamoto explaining his occupation and the ship's weaponry to his acquaintances. In this dialogue, the Tosa dialect form *~kini* appears, which corresponds to *~kara* or *~nanode* in standard Japanese. The *~kini* form is used to connect two clauses and express a reason or cause within the sentence.

9. やき

坂本： 陸奥ははちきんやき、敵んのう。

Sakamoto: *Mutsu wa hachikin yaki, kanan nou.* (I'm no match for tough women like you, Mutsu)

The lines above are spoken by Sakamoto in response to Mutsu's sharp remarks. The term *hachikin* refers to a strong, independent, and assertive woman in the Tosa dialect. In this dialogue, the Tosa dialect form *~yaki* appears, corresponding to *~dakara* in standard Japanese. The *~yaki* form is typically attached to nouns or demonstrative words and functions to express cause, reason, or justification within a sentence.

10. ~じゃき

坂本： どうじゃ銀時？おんしゃ、この狭か星にとじこめておくには勿体ない男じゃき。わしと一緒に…。

Sakamoto: *Dou ja gintoki? Onsha, kono semaka hoshi ni tojikomete oku ni wa mottai nai otoko ja ki. Washi to issho ni...* (How

about it, Gintoki? You're too good to be confined on this tiny planet. Do you want come together...)

The lines above show Sakamoto making a suggestion to his close friend, and thus formal language is not used. In this dialogue, the Tosa dialect form *~jaki* appears, which corresponds to *~dakara* in standard Japanese. The *~jaki* form functions similarly to *~yaki*, occurring at the end of nouns or demonstrative words to express cause, reason, or consequence within a sentence.

11. ~がが？

坂本： 誰じゃー！？ワシをどこに連れてくがが？

Sakamoto: *Dare jaa!? Washi o doko ni tsureteku ga ga?* (Who are you!? Where are you taking me?)

The lines above are spoken by Sakamoto to a stranger who is forcibly dragging him away. In this dialogue, the Tosa dialect form *~gaga?* appears, which corresponds to *~noka?* in standard Japanese. The form *~gaga?* functions as an interrogative marker used to indicate a question within the sentence.

12. ~かや？

新八： えっ、なに、あれ？嘘！？

Shinpachi: E, nani, are? Uso!? (Huh, wait, what? No way!?)

坂本： いよいよ暑さにやられたかや…、何か妙なもんが見えるろ…。

Sakamoto: *Iyo iyo atsusa de yarareta ka ya..., nanka hen na mon ga mieruro...* (I think the heat has finally gotten to me. I'm starting to see weird things)

The lines above are spoken by Sakamoto when he and his companions witness a surprising scene. In his dialogue, the Tosa dialect form *~kaya?* appears, which corresponds to *~ka?* or *~kana?* in standard Japanese. This form is used at the end of a sentence to express uncertainty, doubt, or to seek confirmation.

13. ~じゃろう

陸奥： こんなところで阿呆を相手にしても埒が明かん。まずは船に乗れ。おまんら宇宙に用があるんじゃろ？

Sakamoto: *Konna tokoro de aho o aite ni shitemo rachi ga akan. Mazu wa fune ni nore. Oman ra uchuu ni you ga arun jaro?* (We're getting nowhere if wasting time on these idiots. Get on our ship first. You guys have business in space, right?)

The lines above are spoken by Mutsu as she confirms with her companions whether they intend to travel into space. In this dialogue, the Tosa dialect form *~jaro* appears, which corresponds to *~daro* in standard Japanese. The *~jaro* form is typically used at the end of a sentence to express conjecture or assumption about a situation.

14. ~かえ

坂本： なにをもたもたしちよる、はやく船に運ばんかえ！

Sakamoto: *Nani o mota mota shichoru, hayaku fune ni hakoban kae!* (What's taking you so long! Load them on the ship, quickly!)

The lines above are commands given by Sakamoto to his subordinates; therefore, formal language is not used. In this dialogue, the Tosa dialect form *~kae* appears, which corresponds to *~kane* in standard Japanese. The *~kae* form is used to express a stronger or more urgent question compared to the Tosa dialect form *~gaka?*.

15. ~がよ

陸奥： いったいそんな話いつしとったんじゃ、シューコーゆうとっただけぜよ。

Mutsu: *Ittai sonna hanashi itsu shitottan ja, shuukoo iutotta dake zeyo.* (When on earth did you guys talk about that? He just wheezing the whole time.)

坂本： おまえが厠に行っちよるあいだに、こげなプラカードを見せてくれたがよ。

Sakamoto: *Omae ga kawayu ni icchoru aida ni, koge na purakaado o misete kureta gayo.* (While you were in the restroom, he showed me a placard like this.)

This conversation takes place between Sakamoto and Mutsu, during which Mutsu questions when Sakamoto made a deal, since no discussion occurred with the business partner while she was present. In this dialogue, the Tosa dialect form *~gayo* appears, which corresponds

to *~dayo* in standard Japanese. The suffix *~gayo* is used to add emphasis or assertiveness to a statement.

16. ~ち

坂本： こんなデカイ船、動かすん初めてじゃき、勝手がわからんち。

Sakamoto: *Konna deikai fune, ugokasun hajimete jaki, katte ga wakaran chi.* (This is the first time I've had to pilot big ship like this, I don't know how to do)

These lines are Sakamoto's excuse to his friend after being scolded for pretending he could pilot the ship, even though he was unable to do so when they needed a capable pilot. In this dialogue, Sakamoto uses the Tosa dialect form *~chi*, which corresponds to *~tte*, *~to wa*, or other similar expressions in standard Japanese, depending on the context. The *~chi* form functions as a quotative or explanatory marker used to convey reported speech or explanation within a sentence.

17. ~けんど

新八： おいしい商売って、いったいなにを売るっていうんですか？

Shinpachi: *Oishii shoubai tte, ittai nani o uru tte iun desu ka?* (A sweet deal? What exactly are you trying to offer?)

坂本： ちょっとやさつとのせこい商売では冷やかしにも来んじゃのう。じゃけんども、この大商い、やつらも無視できない。

Sakamoto: *Chotto ya sotto no sekoi shoubai de wa hiyakashi ni mo kon janou. Jakendo mo, kono oo akinai, yatsura mo mushi dekimai.* (Those guys won't even be interested in small-scale deals. However, they won't be able to ignore this offer)

The conversation above takes place between Sakamoto and Shinpachi, who are acquaintances. Because Sakamoto is older, Shinpachi speaks politely, while Sakamoto uses casual language. In this exchange, Shinpachi asks what Sakamoto means by a "sweet deal" that could deceive their opponent and allow them to infiltrate the ship. In Sakamoto's dialogue, the Tosa dialect form *~kendo* appears, which

corresponds to ~kedo or ~keredo in standard Japanese. The form ~kendofunctions as a conjunction meaning “but” or “however,” used to indicate contrast or contradiction between two statements.

CONCLUSION

This study identified seventeen distinct forms of the Tosa dialect in the character dialogues of the anime *Gintama* and examined their grammatical and pragmatic functions within conversational contexts. The analysis revealed that these forms—ranging from aspectual markers such as ~*yu* and ~*chuu* to conjunctive and emphatic expressions like ~*ki*, ~*jaki*, and ~*gayo*—play key roles in conveying nuance, emotion, and character identity. Although the Tosa dialect differs considerably from standard Japanese in both structure and usage, *Gintama* employs a simplified version of the dialect, allowing audiences unfamiliar with regional speech to infer meaning through context. This deliberate adaptation highlights how dialectal variation in popular media not only enriches characterization but also promotes broader appreciation of Japan’s linguistic and cultural diversity.

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