

## USAGE AND MEANING DIFFERENCES OF PAST TENSE FORMS IN JAPANESE

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### Abstract

Our need for language in our daily lives is significantly high. In the process of using this language, we compose sentences using various expressions and grammars so that the idea we want to convey is easy to understand for others. This scientific article discusses the use and differences in meanings of past tense forms in Japanese.

**Keywords:** Verb, tense, past tense, grammar, context, learner, vehicle, agglutinative.

### Introduction

The tense category is one of the grammatical categories of the verb in linguistics. This category expresses the connection of an action or state with time in reality and is implemented in each language through its own methods. While some languages have three or more grammatical tense forms, in some languages the expression of tense is determined based on the context. Therefore, the study of the tense category is important not only from a grammatical point of view, but also from a semantic and functional point of view.

Japanese is distinguished among the world's languages by its complex and unique grammatical structure. In particular, the expression of verbs in tenses is of particular interest to linguists and language learners. Verb tenses perform different meanings and functions depending on the grammatical construction, context, and style of speech.

Structurally, Japanese belongs to the agglutinative language family and is distinguished from other languages by its grammatical system, in particular, the simplicity of expressing the category of tense. In Japanese, tense is expressed mainly in two forms - the present/future tense and the past tense. These two tense forms are attached to the verb by suffixes and can be in the affirmative or negative

form. It is noteworthy that in Japanese, the future tense is understood not through a separate grammatical form, but based on the context, through the present tense forms. This situation can cause certain misunderstandings for language learners at the initial stage.

The fact that Japanese has only two tense forms makes it easier for learners of Japanese, but it also makes it difficult to use tenses correctly. The difficulty lies in the fact that all meanings must be expressed in these three forms.

In Japanese, the past tense of verbs expresses the completion of an action and is grammatically called “過去形” (kako-kei). Japanese verbs are divided into three main groups: Group I (godan), Group II (ichidan), and Group III (irregular verbs). Each group has a different way of changing to the past tense, and the ending of the verb undergoes phonetic changes. Therefore, learning the past tense of verbs is the main foundation for speaking in Japanese. Group II verbs have the simplest conjugation, and they all end with the suffix –ru. In this group, the past tense form is formed by dropping the suffix –ru and replacing it with –ta. For example, the verb taberu (to eat) becomes tabeta (ate) in the past tense, and the verb miru (to see) becomes mita (saw). These verbs are considered the most convenient and understandable in forming the past tense form, since they are not complicated in pronunciation and spelling.

I-group verbs are the most common and the most subject to change. The past tense form of these verbs appears in different forms depending on the syllable at the end of the verb. For example, verbs ending in u, tsu or ru take the suffix -tta in the past tense. Examples such as au (to meet) - atta (met), matsu (to wait) - matta (to wait), toru (to take) - totta (to take) are clear evidence of this. Also, verbs ending in mu, nu, bu take the form -nda in the past tense. Changes such as nomu (to drink) - nonda (drank), shinu (to die) - shinda (died), and asobu (to play) - asonda (played) are formed according to this rule. Verbs ending in ku form the -ita form, for example kaku (to write) - kaita (wrote), but the verb iku (to go) is an exception and is used in the itta form. Verbs ending in gu have the -ida form: oyogu (to swim) - oyoida (to swam). The past tense of verbs ending in su always ends in -shita: hanasu (to speak) - hanashita (to spoke).

Group III verbs in Japanese are irregular verbs, and there are two of them: suru (to do) and kuru (to come). These verbs do not obey phonetic rules, so their past tense forms are memorized separately. The past tense of the verb suru takes the form shita (did), and kuru takes the form kita (came). These verbs are used very

actively in Japanese, so their past tense is often found in everyday communication.

There is also a negative form of the past tense form, which is formed by changing the negative form -nai to -nakatta. For example, taberu - tabenakatta (did not eat), iku - ikanakatta (did not go), suru - shinakatta (did not do), kuru - konakatta (did not come). This form clearly expresses that the event did not happen or the action was not performed.

In conclusion, the verb tenses in the Japanese language, their grammatical forms and features of use were comprehensively analyzed in this article. A peculiarity of the language is that the present and future tenses are expressed in one form, while the past tense has a separate form, indicating the completion of the action. Continuous forms express the continuation of the action or the neutral preservation of the state. The concept of tense in the Japanese language often depends on the context, time words, and the environment of communication. In particular, the differences between formal and informal styles also reveal the cultural layer of the language. In Japanese, past tense forms are an important grammatical tool for expressing the semantic clarity of speech and the sequence of events. The transition of the verb to the past tense not only indicates the completion of the action, but also indicates the emotional tone of the sentence, its connection with a specific event. Therefore, the scope and semantic differences of past tense forms occupy a special place in Japanese grammar.

Another important use of the past tense is to express experience or personal experience. For example, the expression tabeta koto ga aru (I ate) indicates the presence of experience in cases where the exact time of the action does not matter. Here, the past tense is a grammatical device that indicates the life experience of a person.

Another semantic feature of the past tense is the use of past tense forms in literature, stories, and artistic texts to enhance the content of the present event. Often, in written Japanese, past tense forms are used to bring the event closer to the reader, to describe it vividly, or to give it a dramatic tone. For example, the ta-form can also be chosen to describe the state that a character is experiencing at that time during the story.

Although the past tense forms in Japanese differ depending on the group, their differences in meaning are also important. The negative past tense form - nakatta - indicates that the action was not performed at all or the plan did not come true.

This form is used more often in sentences with an explanatory or apologetic content: *ikanakatta* (I did not go), *minakatta* (I did not see). This form gives precise information that the event did not happen.

Another interesting difference is the level of politeness of the past tense. For example, *tabeta* is a simple form, while *tabemashita* is a form of respect. This difference determines not only the pastness of the action, but also the level of respect for the listener. Thus, the choice of past tense forms in Japanese is not only related to grammatical rules, but also to the culture of communication.

In conclusion, the use of past tense forms in Japanese forms a multi-layered semantic system. In addition to indicating the completion of the action, they determine the semantic significance of the event, the situation of speech, the level of politeness, and even the stylistic color of the sentence. Therefore, when studying past tense forms, it is very important to know not only the rules of their formation, but also what meaning they carry in speech.

## References

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