

## ■ *Ta* Form

Japanese predicates possess contrast of tense between non-past (present and future) vs. past. The past form is called the *ta* form.

(1) *neru* ‘sleep’ (future) – *neta* (past)

*aru* ‘exist’ (present) – *atta* (past)

*nete iru* ‘is sleeping’ (present) – *nete ita* (past)

Some consider the contrast between the verbal forms *suru* and *shita* as aspectual contrast of non-perfective vs. perfective (has not happened vs. has happened).

The *ta* form of stative predicates (stative verbs, adjectives, noun predicates) fundamentally expresses past state.

(1) *Mukashi koko ni ōkina biru ga atta* ‘Once there was a big building here.’ (General statement)

(2) (In response to a question, *Tarō minakatta?* ‘Didn’t you see Taro?’) *Tarō wa kyōshitsu ni ita yo* ‘Taro was in the classroom.’ (Individual situation)

The *ta* form (*shita* form) of non-stative verbs (motion verbs, verbs of change) has the following usages.

(a) *Shita* expresses past movement and change. The negative form is *shinakatta*.

(3) *Wakaikoro wa yoku tetsuya shita* ‘I used to stay up all night when I was young’ (*Amari tetsuya shinakatta* ‘I didn’t stay up all night that much’). (General statement)

(4) *Kinō tetsuya shita* ‘I stayed up all night yesterday’ (*Kinō wa tetsuya shinakatta* ‘I didn’t stay up all night yesterday’). (Individual situation)

(b) *Mō ...shita* expresses that the movement or change has already taken place. The negative form is *mada ...shiteinai*.

(5) A: *Oyu, (mō) waita?* ‘Has the water boiled (yet)?’

B: *Un, (mō) waita yo.* ‘Yeah, it’s (already) boiled.’ (*Iya, mada waitenai* ‘No, it hasn’t boiled yet.’)

(c) *Shita* expresses the realization of a movement or change.

(6) *Pitchaa, dai ikkyū, nagemashita.* ‘The pitcher threw his first ball.’

(7) *Ore mo toshi o totta naa.* ‘I’ve indeed aged.’

Some view usages (b) and (c) as a type of past (the past connected with the present), and others view them as the present perfect.

The *ta* form also expresses the speaker’s psychological attitude, such as discovering, recalling, looking back, counterfactual, and urging (the *ta* form of mood).

(8) *A, atta.* ‘Oh, here it is.’ (Discovery)

(9) *Sō ieba, asu wa yasumi datta* ‘Speaking of which, tomorrow is a day off.’

*Kyō wa nanno hi dakke?* ‘What holiday is it today, do you know?’ (Recalling)

(10) *Kono hon wa kinō kara koko ni atta* ‘This book has been here since yesterday. (Looking back)

(11) *Sassato shigoto o sumasete ireba, imagoro wa asonde irareta noni* ‘Had you finished your work promptly, you would be having a good time by now. (Counterfactual)

(12) *Sassato kaetta, kaetta* ‘Shoo. Hurry home.’ (Urging)

There are many theories among researchers as to how to explain why there are so many usages of the *ta* form. Currently there is no one definitive theory.

→ テンス Tense (2-G), アスペクト Aspect (2-G), 動詞 Verbs (2-B)

#### ● References

Inoue, Masaru (2001) ‘Gendai nihongo no *ta*’ (*Ta* in Contemporary Japanese) in Tsukuba Gengo Bunka Forum ed., *Ta no gengogaku* (Linguistic Study of *Ta*). Hituzi Syobo.

Kinsui, Satoshi, et al. (2000) *Nihongo no bunpō 2: toki, hitei to toritate* (Japanese Grammar 2: Time/Negation and Focus). Iwanami Shoten.

Kudo, Mayumi (1995) *Asupekuto, tensu taikai to tekusuto* (System of Aspect & Tense and Text). Hituzi Syobo.

Suzuki, Shigeyuki (1996) *Keitairon, josetsu* (Morphology: Introduction). Mugi Shobo.

Terashima, Hideo (1984) *Nihongo no shintakusu to imi II* (Japanese Syntax and Meaning II). Kurosio Publishers.

(Inoue Masaru)