



The Meaning of the Forming Elements of the Greeting '*Aisatsu*' in Japanese

Yayat Hidayat¹, Asep Achmad Muhlisian^{2*}

Prodi Bahasa Jepang, STBA Yapari ABA Bandung, Indonesia

email: yat@stba.ac.id, asepachmad@stba.ac.id*

*Corresponding author

Info Artikel

Sejarah Artikel:

Diterima November 2022

Disetujui Januari 2022

Dipublikasikan Maret 2023

Keywords:

Aisatsu meaning,
Japanese Expression,
Aisatsu.

Abstract

Greetings are categorized as an essential element in daily communication in Japan. The Japanese language learners besides learning the language must be able to culture as well. In this study, we discuss the meaning of the forming elements of the greeting "aisatsu" in the Japanese language which was analyzed using a qualitative descriptive method by taking data sources from Nihongo Nooryoku Shiken Shutsudai Kizun as many as 31 expressions related to everyday greetings equivalent to elementary and intermediate levels. The results of the study found that after going through the sorting process based on the basic word and affix and then also describing the lexical meaning of each expression, it can be seen that there is a relationship between the forming of the expression and the meaning of the expression after being used as a greeting and both these basic expressions influence each other in forming greeting expressions or aisatsu in Japanese.

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✉ Alamat korespondensi:
Gedung B4 Lantai 2 FBS Unnes
Kampus Sekaran, Gunungpati, Semarang, 50229
E-mail: chie@unnes.ac.id

E-ISSN 2685-6662

P-ISSN 2252-6250

INTRODUCTION

Learning a language is not only about learning and getting to know the structure of language. More than that, what is no less important is learning the externalities of language and culture. Language cannot be separated from the socio-cultural context of the speakers of society because language is a cultural phenomenon apart from being a social phenomenon (Devianty, 2017; Geertz, 1973). As a cultural phenomenon, a language is a form of social behaviour that involves at least two participants (Kuraesin, 2021; Noermanzah, 2019). The application of language as part of the culture in society, for example, is the culture of greeting or greeting, which in Japanese is called *aisatsu* (挨拶).

The greetings or *aisatsu* that Japanese people often use to interact with others are very diverse. *Aisatsu* is essential in Japan because Japanese people see and judge someone by how they greet others properly (Pratita, Mael, & Nurhadi, 2018). When Japanese people meet someone, for example, their neighbours or contacts always make small talk, this is a characteristic of Japanese Culture, which always pays attention to solid human relations by showing hospitality to someone or expressing respect.

The term *aisatsu* is linguistically formed from two Kanji characters, namely 挨拶 [ai] and 挨拶 [satsu] (Persson, 2012; Saifudin, 2021). The character 挨拶 means “pushing from behind; push forward; draw closer,” and 挨拶 have almost the same meaning, namely “to approach, to be close” and “to place A between B and C.” According to the Idea cited by Anugerah (2022), the term *aisatsu* means the origin of “dialogue,” “exchange of words”, or “question and answer”. Also, if we look up “*aisatsu*” in an ordinary Japanese dictionary, we will find words like “friendship” and “respect”. From this, it can be concluded that *aisatsu* is a social act (Saifudin, 2021).

Meaning like this can be interpreted that *aisatsu* is a tool always used in human interaction or communication. Thus the use of *aisatsu* is closely related to social and cultural roles. When studying Japanese culture, greeting or *aisatsu* is the first thing foreign language students learn, especially Japanese (Hidayaturohmah, 2013; B. A. Nugroho, 2019). The earliest word taught or asked by the learner is a greeting. So that questions related to greetings, such as “Good morning, good afternoon, good night”, in

Japanese are typical questions for elementary-level students.

When elementary-level students ask the basic words of the greeting expression before a compound word crystallizes into a greeting expression, it turns out that there are many meanings of the basic words that form it very far and are not related to greetings. According to Kuraesin (2021), these expressions can finally be accepted in society because they contain ethics and norms, historical and cultural backgrounds, and local customs that colour expressions in an area or region.

Kuraesin also gave examples of expressions of greeting or *aisatsu* that have become more diverse, especially in Japan, based on regional, time, and season differences. For example, greeting expressions 「おはよう (ございます)」 「こんにちは」 「暑いですね」 which means (good morning/ good afternoon/ today it's hot isn't?) and the greeting as seen in the example has changed from its original meaning (Kuraesin, 2021).

Japanese society judges a person by how people greet them. *Aisatsu* is a norm in Japanese society. Mizutani (1987), cited by Pratita (2018), says that *aisatsu* is a phrase used to express relationships between humans, maintain good relations among human beings, or as an expression in conveying language, and not just convey emotion or information through language. So, for the Japanese, *aisatsu* is a vital thing to do, not just small talk. It can be said that *aisatsu* is an integral part of the habits of Japanese society and has become a culture so that the language used and the gestures made are of great concern (Nakanishi, 2008; Pratita et al., 2018). What becomes the focus is the expression of the opening itself which is placed in social contexts.

Based on their placement in social contexts, preambles can be addressed to people who want to be known, are unknown in one community, and are said to have the same language norms. (Dewi & Sulastri, 2016; Sundayra, 2022). Furthermore, Dewi (2016) also revealed that making small talk with people who do not know or want to know is the purpose of opening or starting to develop social relations between them. This process is an approach to social relations between speakers. On the other hand, pleasantries for people already known are for the sole purpose of keeping the relationship ever built. This

process is called the retention or maintenance of close social relations between speakers.

Several studies on *aisatsu* concerning Japanese culture have been conducted, especially those related to the concept and use of *aisatsu*. One of the complexities of *aisatsu* discussed by Persson (2012) aims to provide a broader and more diverse description of the forms of *aisatsu*, not only looking at its direct function. By using *aisatsu* material when speaking in a speech, Persson revealed that the analysis results found that the complexity of *aisatsu* becomes clear by looking at *aisatsu* in speech both in terms of expression and the culture surrounding it.

Furthermore, Saifudin (2021) study *aisatsu* to express the concept of using *aisatsu*. He found that *aisatsu* is used as a greeting, a request for permission, an expression of the speaker's feelings, both expressions of apology, thanks, and feelings of empathy for the speech partner. It is also concluded that *aisatsu* is a ritual related to politeness ethics. It is a sign that the speaker is ready and hopes that the speech partner is also ready to be involved in the interaction.

Sundayra (2022) revealed future studies about polite speech gestures in Japan. According to Sundayra, *aisatsu* in Japanese hospitality is an expression of praise, respect, encouragement and a standard greeting. Two varieties of *aisatsu* are frequently used in hotels and dining establishments. The first category includes time-related *aisatsu*, such as *konnichiwa*, *ohayou gozaimasu*, etc. *Irasshaimase*, *yokoso*, and *omataseitashimashita* are two *aisatsu* for guests and customers. Building positive relationships between staff and visitors is the primary goal of both expressions.

In addition, many studies allude to *aisatsu* as basic Japanese language learning, especially related to essential Japanese culture such as *ojigi* (Hafid & Rahmadinata, 2022; Hidayaturohmah, 2013; R. D. Nugroho & Ainie, 2021). Furthermore, previous research on the word elements forming the expression *aisatsu* can be seen in Kandou's research (2022), which reveals the formation and use of *kandoushi aisatsu* in anime.

However, several previous studies have revealed more about functions and use in daily activities. Only some have touched on the word elements that make up the expression of *aisatsu*. Thus, in this study, the authors try to see the other side of

Japanese greeting expressions, which is to look more at the meaning of the elements forming greeting expressions in Japanese. This study aims to make teaching Japanese *aisatsu* easier, especially in understanding Japanese culture. This research aims to find a relationship between elements forming the expression and the meaning of the expression after it is used as a greeting.

The basic word is the core word contained in an expression of greeting. If the word stands alone, it will show a specific meaning which can generally be known in the dictionary. After the base word is given the suffix, *eat*, a new expression will be formed, as in the expression of greeting. For example, the expression "*Arigatoo gozaimasu*" ('good morning'). This word consists of 3 (three) forming elements, "*ari*", "*gatoo*" and "*gozaimasu*". "*Arigatoo*" comes from the word "*aru*" followed by "*~dwarf*" then the sound assimilates into "*arigatai*" which means "difficult to exist". "*~too*" in "*arigatai*" is the result of sound assimilation from -I adjectives ending in "*~ai*" joining "*~gozaimasu*", becoming the sound "*~oo*". Meanwhile, "*~gozaimasu*" is a respectful adverb. "*gozaimasu*" here has no meaning because it does not stand alone. (Fadhillah, 2020; Rosliana & Lathifah, 2019)

Understanding the meaning of a greeting helps to know the true meaning of the contained expression of a greeting. It will also help understand why a kind of situation, time, and status/position of the speech partner *arises* when pronouncing certain greeting expressions. On the other hand, knowing the origin of a greeting expression can be a bridge to understanding the way of thinking of the people who own a particular language, especially regarding the nation's perspective on himself and his speech partners.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method by dividing the forming elements into primary and additional groups. Because the additional elements are placed at the beginning of the main element and some at the end of the main element, the additional elements are divided into additions at the beginning and additions at the end of the main forming elements. The emergence of additional elements gives a different meaning from the main elements as primary elements. Therefore,

knowing the basic meaning of the additional elements is necessary.

Given that there are so many expressions of greeting in Japanese, the discussion will only include greeting expressions that usually appear at the level of basic and intermediate Japanese conversation according to what is taken from The Japan Foundation and the Association of International Education Japan in the latest revision "Nihongo Nooryoku Shiken Shutsudai Kizun". The expressions taken are expressions that are included in Japanese greetings or *aisatsu* based on 挨拶語辞典 or Dictionary of Japanese greetings or greetings (Okuyama: 1970). The following are greeting expressions used as data sources.

| | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Arigatoo gozaimasu | 17 Kon`Nichi Wa |
| 2. Dewa, Mata | 18 Odaiji Ni |
| 3. Doo Itashimashite | 19 Ogenki Desu Ka |
| 4. Doozo, Yoroshiku | 20 Ohayoo Gozaimasu |
| 5. Gochisoo Sama Deshita | 21 Ojama Shimasu |
| 6. Gomen kudasai | 22 Okaerinasai |
| 7. Gomen nasai | 23 Okagesamade |
| 8. Hajimemashite | 24 Omataseshimashita |
| 9. Irasshaimase | 25 Omedetoo Gozaimasu |
| 10. Itadakimasu | 26 Oyasuminasai |
| 11. Itte Kimasu | 27 Sayoonara |
| 12. Itte Mairimasu | 28 Shitsurei Shimasu |
| 13. Itte Rasshai | 29 Sumimasen |
| 14. Kashikomasrimashita | 30 Tadaima |
| 15. Kochira Koso | 31 Yoku Irasshaimashita |
| 16. Konban Wa | |

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Forming Elements of Greeting Expressions

Before explaining the elements of a greeting, here is a construction table for Japanese greeting expressions. The table displays greeting expressions, basic words, initial and final affixes, and the meaning of greeting expressions. In the case of a word that does not have a specific meaning, the general meaning of the word is written. Furthermore, to get an idea of the word class, the word class of the additional word is also included:

1. Basic Words

Based on the data analyzed, all expressions of greeting have basic words. All essential word elements are usually used in expressions other than

greetings, except for the word "men" in "gomen kudasai" and "gomen nasai" which cannot be used independently unless accompanied by "go-" so that it becomes "gomen" which means "sorry", "pardon".

Of the 31 expressions of greeting, six expressions have two basic words in them, namely "doozo, yoroshiku", "itte kimasu", "itte mairimasu", "itterasshai" and "yoku irasshaimashita". These six words are seen as having two basic words because there are two words that each can stand alone and express meaning. Even for "doozo, yoroshiku" each part can stand alone and be used as an expression of greeting. While "Doozo" is usually used as a short form of an expression that states "request". Expressions involving "suru," such as "ojamashimasu" and "shishurei shimasu" are not seen as two elements because one word, "suru" cannot express a meaning.

In terms of word class, there are 5 Adjectives (3 Adj.-i ('*keiyooshi*') and 2 Adj. -na '*keiyodooshi*'), 5 Adverbs (*Fukushi*), 8 Nouns (*Meishi*), and 17 Verbs (*Dooshi*). This data shows that many verbs appear as elements of basic words. However, even so there is the word "iku" which appears three times, namely in "itte kimasu", "itte mairimasu" and "itterasshai". Meanwhile, "irassharu" appears in "irasshaimase", "itterasshai", and "yoku irasshaimashita".

2. Affixes

Two expressions do not have affixes, so the basic word is used directly as an expression of greeting. The remaining 29 expressions involve additional elements in the form of affixes. The affixes are further broken down into two parts: the prefix and the suffix of the root word. Of the 29 expressions that use affixes, 12 of them use additions at the beginning, 3 of them start with "go-" and nine starts with "o-". "go-" always appears to accompany greeting expressions that have noun affixes. In contrast, "o-" accompanies greeting expressions with verb and adjective base words. The use of "o-" and "go-" is usually used to express respect (*teineigo*) for a word.

The affixes at the end of basic words are varied, both morphologically, semantically, and syntactically. There are even cases that can be studied phonologically. Except for "konbanwa" and "kon'nichiwa", all expressions have a respectful addition (*keigo*). "odaijini", even though it does not have an additional final salute but begins with "o-" expresses respect. In "doozo yoroshiku" respect is

raised by using "yoroshii" which has a respectful nuance.

Respectful nuances are raised by using respectful words such as "gozaimasu" which accompanies adjectives, "-masu" in positive verbs, "-masen", in negative verbs "-mashite" in conjunctions. "-kudasai", in the application of the noun, and "-nasai" in command of the verb.

In some greeting expressions, respect is raised by paying attention to the greeting direction aimed at the speaker or the addressee, in "ittekimasu" for example. "Kimasu" from "kuru" means 'coming', so with this expression, the speaker hopes "go and come back". This expression can mean "goodbye" when said by people who are going to travel. However, it can also mean "goodbye" when said by people left behind because "kimasu" does not distinguish the direction of expression. When this expression of greeting is loaded with respect, the expression will be different. "Itte mairimasu" for "goodbye" and "itterasshai" for "farewell" .

In "Goodbye" contains the fact that the person who said (speaker) will do an activity, namely "go", and contains the hope to be able to "come again". People who say as actors "go" and "come", therefore the word used is the word "come" to humble themselves 'kenjoogo', namely "mairu" which then conjugates to "mairimasu", so that it gets "itte mairimasu". Whereas in "Goodbye", the person who will "come" is not the speaker but the speech partner. Therefore, the word " irassharu " is a respectful form of "kuru" for other people 'sonkeigo'. The hope to be able to reply again is manifested in the form of a polite order so that "irassharu" becomes "irasshai", the "-nasai" form of "irassharu".

In this case, the use of greeting expressions cannot be separated from the rules of language. This thought can be further proven by looking at other expressions of greeting. For example, "irasshaimase" and "itadakimasu". Etymologically "irasshaimase" comes from "irassharu" including the word respect for others 'sonkeigo' from "kuru/iku/iru" ('come/go/there'). "itadakimasu" includes the word respect for oneself. `kenjoogo` from "taberu/nomu/morau" . The greeting "irasshaimase" is said by someone when receiving prospective buyers/ guests/ visitors to a place of business, such as a shop or restaurant. In this case, the greeting "welcome" is not for the speaker but for other people. Therefore,

the form of respect that is applied is sonkeigo. In contrast, "itadakimasu" is used when someone tastes a dish or receives a gift. In this case, the speaker is the recipient of the dish or gift, so the variety of respect used is directed towards himself, so it is understandable if, in cases like this, it is used kenjoogo.

3. The Effect of Basic Word Meanings on the Meaning of Greetings

It has been established that some expressions have the same meaning as the primary word after comparing the meaning of the basic word with that of greeting expressions. However, some are incredibly close. This indicates that there is no understanding of the greeting's meaning if we only consider its fundamental meaning. The greeting appears to be a part of a statement, and its significance as a greeting expression is concealed in the unsaid portion. As a result, the first group consists of expressions with the same meaning as their root words, while the second group consists of expressions with hidden meanings.

The first group, as mentioned earlier, is an expression of greeting with the same meaning as the basic word. Greetings that belong to this group are:

| Greetings | Meaning |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Arigatoo gozaimasu | Thank you |
| 2. Gochisoosamadeshita | Thank you for the dish |
| 3. Irasshaimase | Welcome |
| 4. Itadakimasu | I accepted |
| 5. Ittekimasu | See you later |
| 6. Ittemairimasu | Goodbye |
| 7. Itterasshai | Goodbye / Farewell |
| 8. Konbanwa | Good night |
| 9. kon`nichiwa | Good afternoon |
| 10. ogenki desu ka, | How are you? |
| 11. ojama shimasu | Sorry to bother you |
| 12. okaerinasai | Welcome back |
| 13. omatase shimashita, | Sorry to interrupted you |
| 14. omedetoo gozaimasu | Congratulations! |
| 15. oyasumi nasai | Have a good night sleep |
| 16. shitsurei shimasu | Sorry to bother |

| | |
|---------------------------|--------------|
| 17. yoku irasshaimashita. | Welcome back |
|---------------------------|--------------|

The second group is greeting expressions whose meaning will be known after thinking about continuing the greeting statement. Greetings that belong to this group are:

| Greetings | Meaning |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Dewa, mata | Goodbye |
| 2. Doo itashimashite, | Welcome ack |
| 3. Doozo yoroshiku | Hope you like it |
| 4. <i>Gomen kudasai</i> | Excuse me |
| 5. <i>Gomen nasai</i> | sorry |
| 6. Hajimemashite | let me introduce myself |
| 7. Kashikomarimashita | I understand |
| 8. Kochira koso | Me too |
| 9. Odaijini | Get well soon |
| 10. Ohayoo gozaimasu | Good morning |
| 11. Okagesamade | Thank you for your help |
| 12. Sayoonara | See you again |
| 13. Sumimasen | sorry |
| 14. Tadaima | I am back |

At first glance, this division needs to provide reliable distinguishing power, mainly because the discussion of this paper does not come to a discussion regarding the use of each word of greeting. So it is unclear which expressions of greeting can give birth to new expressions of greeting and which ones are only limited to certain situations.

CONCLUSION

It can be seen that there is a meaning relationship between the elements forming an expression and the meaning of the expression when it is used as a greeting through the analysis of 31 data using a sorting process based on the Main Forming Elements (UPU) and Additional Elements (UT), as well as by describing the lexical meaning of each expression. However, this influence results from both the UPU and its auxiliary components. Another thing that can be inferred is that Japanese greeting

expressions generally pay attention to the direction of speech while incorporating a variety of respects.

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