

## Function and Meaning of Japanese Greetings “Tadaima” and “Okaerinasai” on Social Media X: Sociolinguistic Study

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### Abstract

This study explores the functions and meanings of the Japanese greetings *tadaima* and *okaerinasai* as they are used on the social media platform X. Traditionally, these greetings serve specific functions: *tadaima* is used when someone returns home, and *Okaerinasai* is used to welcome them back, typically within shared living spaces. However, as language evolves, the context and usage of these greetings have expanded beyond their original meanings, particularly in digital spaces where formal rules of language use are more fluid. The data in this study will be analyzed using qualitative methods and sociolinguistic theories that address shifts in the function and meaning of *tadaima* and *okaerinasai* when used by social media users on X. The aim of this study is to examine how these greetings are used on social media platform X, exploring the differences between their traditional and contemporary uses and how these shifts influence their function and meaning in online interactions.

**Keywords:** Language Function; meaning; *aisatsu*; social media

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## INTRODUCTION

Greetings (*aisatsu*), which are governed by specific rules of use, are also influenced by the dynamic nature of language. Language constantly evolves, impacting all aspects of its structure, including greetings in Japanese. According to Mizutani (1995), *aisatsu* or greetings are expressions used to establish and maintain relationships, as well as convey meaning through language, not merely emotions or information (Pratita, 2018). The definition of *aisatsu* in Japanese, as outlined by Nomoto (1994:11) in Ashadi (2020), is as follows: (1) a greeting, such as 'good morning,' accompanied by a bow, when meeting someone in the morning; (2) a greeting spoken at a ceremony or meeting, such as an opening speech at an event; (3) a greeting in the form of an official statement to inform others of personal changes, among other things; and (4) a greeting in the form of a reply or an acceptance of service. Meanwhile, the characteristics of greetings include: (1) serving a social

function; (2) containing no inherent meaning in the expression itself; (3) being standardized, with simplification occurring once the expression becomes established; and (4) being influenced by the relationship between the speaker and the listener, as evidenced by the expression of treatment, gestures, and behavior (Kenji Tomosada, *Aisatsu*, p. 3 in Rina, 2023).

Greetings in Japanese, such as *tadaima* and *okaerinasai*, have undergone shifts in both function and meaning. According to Rina (2023), *Tadaima* is a greeting used when someone returns home. Sawada (2020) further observes that both *tadaima* and *okaerinasai* are exchanged among individuals sharing the same living space. For Japanese people, confirming that they are 'in the same space together' is considered important for fostering social connections. This practice extends beyond household settings, as even in university laboratories, greetings like 'I'm home' and 'Welcome home' are commonly used among members of the same room. While *okaerinasai* is used by individuals to welcome someone home, Maeda (1985), as cited in Rina (2023), also notes that there are variations of greetings used when entering and leaving the house, one of which is *okaerinasaimase* (Welcome home). *Okaerinasaimase* is a more formal variant of *okaerinasai*. In Japanese, this greeting is employed to welcome someone upon their return home. Both *tadaima* and *okaerinasai* are greetings used at specific times and are governed by distinct rules related to the arrival and welcoming of individuals at home. Osamu (1995) argues that *aisatsu* is an expression used to establish or maintain relationships between individuals. As such, adhering to the rules of their usage is important to prevent misunderstandings or offenses that could potentially strain relationships or lead to conflict. However, the use of *aisatsu* has evolved over time, particularly in the context of social media X. Social media serves as a medium of expression that does not constrain users to strict language rules. As a result, greetings, including *tadaima* and *okaerinasai*, may vary in their usage on social media.

Social media has become an integral part of modern life, with nearly everyone using it to connect with others and share information about their interests. It also serves as a valuable platform for learning, particularly for foreign language learners, as it facilitates communication with native speakers. However, alongside the evolving use of greetings in Japanese and the changing nature of social interactions, the use of greetings out of context has started to emerge. These shifts in the function and meaning of Japanese greetings may lead to misunderstandings and misinformation among social media users. Consequently, this study aims to analyze the use of *aisatsu* on the social media platform X, examining how the function and meaning of these greetings change within this context.

Several studies related to *aisatsu* primarily discuss the classification of the functions of each *aisatsu*, as well as the usage and concept of *aisatsu*, as seen in Saifudin's research (2021). There is also research by Muhlisan and Hidayat (2023) that discusses the meaning of the formative elements in Japanese *aisatsu*. However, this study focuses on how the functions and meanings of the greetings *tadaima* and *okaerinasai* shift when used by Japanese speakers on X. Therefore, this study will provide evidence based on the analysis of the differences between greetings used according to traditional rules and those employed by users of X.

## METHOD

This section will explain the methods used in this analysis. It will cover four main areas: research design, data sources and data collection, and data analysis.

### Research Design

This research is a descriptive study with a qualitative method to analyze the data. This approach is used to explain and analyze a phenomenon that occurs in-depth. According to Creswell in Noor, qualitative research is a complex description, studying words, detailed reports of respondents' views, and conducting studies on natural situations (2012). Qualitative research applies its practices by having its own position, providing space for the researcher to shape the design of the study, and focusing on a single concept or phenomenon that occurs within the data. In this research, accurate data interpretation is required to validate the findings in order to achieve the desired results. Through this explanation, this method is the right option to analyze phenomena occurring in society in the form of text, such as posts on social media.

### Data Sources and Data Collection

This research utilizes data from posts on social media platform X. The posts analyzed are those containing sentences or phrases that incorporate the expressions *tadaima* and *okaerinasai*. Posts accompanied by images are also considered data if they meet the specified criteria. The selected data consists of posts uploaded by native Japanese speakers, with the objective of exploring the evolution of language use among native speakers. The posts included in the analysis were uploaded between 2024 and January 2025. A relatively short time frame was chosen to ensure the data's recency.

Data collection in this study employed documentation methods and observation techniques, including screen captures and note-taking. Data were gathered from social media platform X, which had been sorted using the observation method. The initial step in data collection involved searching for keywords, specifically the greetings *tadaima* and *okaerinasai*, in the search bar of X. Subsequently, data selection proceeded by sorting the posts containing both expressions, followed by the use of the screen capture method to obtain screenshots of the relevant posts. Since *tadaima* can denote both 'I'm home' and 'right now,' careful sorting was essential to ensure the selected data aligned with the research objectives. Once all data were collected, the selected posts were re-examined to verify any shifts in function and meaning prior to analysis. The note-taking technique was then employed to transcribe the contents of the posts, which were subsequently used as data for this study. Finally, the collected data were categorized based on their function and meaning.

### Data Analysis

First, the analysis will begin by examining the use of the two greeting expressions in posts on social media platform X. The analysis of the functions of these greetings will form the foundation of this study and will be discussed through the lens of sociolinguistic theory to understand their social usage. Once the changes in the functions of *tadaima* and *okaerinasai* in posts on social media X are understood, we can then identify how their social meanings shift in accordance with the changing functions of these expressions. To analyze their social meanings, this study will draw on Coupland's theory (2007), which posits that social meaning pertains to how

individuals assign and derive meaning from their culture, community, personal history, social institutions, and social relationships.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Here is the frequency of data found on social media X, presented in table form.

**Table 1.** The frequency of data found on social media X

	<i>Tadaima</i>	<i>Okaerinasai</i>
frequencies	36	28

The results found were that there were several uses of *tadaima* and *okaerinasai* that did not follow the rules or regulations for their use. Among them are the following (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Several uses of *tadaima* and *okaerinasai*

Greeting's expression	Actual function	Function used in Social Media X	Meaning after the new function
<i>Tadaima</i> Data : 3-1 3-2 3-3 3-4	Returning home	Returning to activities you haven't done in a long time	Home - Activities
		Returning to a long-abandoned social media platform (on hiatus)	Home - social media/internet
		Returning to community/fans	Home - Fans
	<i>Okaerinasai</i> Data : 3-5 3-6 3-7 3-8	Welcoming people who return home	Welcoming the return of someone who has long been absent from their previous activities.
Welcoming the arrival of individuals who have left a group, or when people who spend time together in the same room have been absent for a while.			Home - Membership (not a place)
		Welcoming the return of someone to community / fans	Home - Fans
Welcoming old hairstyle		Welcoming old hairstyle that has been used long time before	Home - old things that the person has used to be

### Data 3-1

Data 3-1 presents an X user (@taniya001), a V-tuber (Virtual YouTuber), announcing her return to the platform X. The term 'reincarnated' suggests that the user has been absent from the platform for an extended period, during which they

changed their animated character to align with the image shown, thus alluding to reincarnation. In this context, the use of *tadaima* refers to the social media platform X, which the user regards as 'home,' symbolizing their return to its community – specifically the fans and other users of the platform. The user employs *tadaima* as a greeting to mark their return to their original activities. Chen (2023) notes, 'When I go home, I will say *ただいま*. This illustrates a shift in the concept of 'home,' traditionally understood as a physical dwelling, to an environment that has been 'lived in' for an extended period, albeit virtually rather than physically. Furthermore, from a social perspective, a close relationship has been cultivated between the user and their fans, making *tadaima* a fitting expression to convey the user's sense of returning home.



7:09 AM · 17 Nov 22

“突然ですが再受肉しました！！  
 ただいま~~~~!!!!!!”  
 “*totsuzen desuga daijuniku shimashita!!*  
 “*Tadaima~~~~!!!!!!*”  
 “Suddenly, I was reincarnated!!  
 I’m home”

### Data 3-2

Data 3-2 presents an X user, @Fuwa\_Minato, who uploads an animated profile picture of himself and states, 'I'm home, internet.' This post suggests that the user has been absent from social media X and the internet for an extended period, with his return to the internet marked by the greeting expression *tadaima*. The use of *tadaima* here signifies the user's long involvement with the internet and social media. In this instance, the expression *tadaima* has shifted in function, particularly in its interactional role. Kenji Tomosada ('*Aisatsu*,' p. 3 in Rina, 2023) asserts that one characteristic of *aisatsu* is that expressions, gestures, and behaviors are shaped by the relationship between the speaker and the listener. However, in this case, the condition of 'between the speaker and listener' is not met, as the user does not directly address a specific person, and 'internet' is neither a living entity nor a distinct community such as fans or friends. Consequently, in this context, the meaning of 'home' has shifted to

represent the internet as a place, albeit virtual, where the speaker has spent considerable time. Based on his statement, it seems that the user has been engaged with the internet for a long period, leading to the perception of the internet as 'home'.



“ただいまインターネット”  
 “*tadaima intaanetto*”  
 “I’m home internet”

### Data 3-3

Data 3-3 presents an X user named ないこ (Naiko), who uploads a photo of a notification letter regarding her return to the world of social media after a hiatus. This return is indicated by the term 復帰する (*fukki suru*), which means 'to return to the original situation.' The use of the expression '*tadaima*' in this context underscores that she is returning to an activity she has previously engaged in, as also highlighted by the use of '復帰する' (*fukki suru*). In the introduction, Rina (2023) notes that *tadaima* is a greeting used when someone returns home. In this case, social media X and its fan community are perceived by the speaker as 'home,' and the greeting *tadaima* is employed to announce her 'return' to this virtual space. Furthermore, the phrase 'Go shinpai wo okakeshimashita' (Apologies for causing you concern) is directed toward her fans who have waited for her return during her hiatus. This exemplifies that *tadaima* is typically used with people who share the same living space, and for Japanese people, confirming that they are 'in the same space together' is crucial for fostering social connections (Sawada, 2020). However, in this instance, the 'space' is a virtual medium that does not exist physically. Nevertheless, by using the greeting *tadaima*, the speaker and her audience (fans) appear to share a strong bond, with fans themselves being regarded as part of the 'home' for the speaker.



【ご報告】 本日より、ないこ活動復帰します。  
ご心配をおかけしました。  
ただいま！

“[Go-houkoku] honjitsu yori naiko katsudou fukki shimasu”  
“Go shinpai wo okakeshimashita”  
“Tadaima”

“[Announcement] As of today, Naiko will be returning to activities.  
Apologies for causing you concern.  
I'm home!”

### Data 3-4 and 3-5

Data 3-4 and 3-5 are shown in a single image to clarify the concept of the two greetings used in one situation as paired greetings (*aisatsu*), as Perrson stated that *aisatsu* is usually viewed upon from a conversational point of view (2012).

Data 3-4 presents the use of the greeting *tadaima* by one of the members of the Japanese band ViViD (the guitarist), announcing his return to the entertainment industry after a ten-year hiatus. The post reveals that the original function of the greeting *tadaima* is to signify the band ViViD's return to its activities in the entertainment world. Indirectly, the function of *tadaima* serves as a symbol that the entertainment industry and the band's activities have come to represent the concept of 'home' in this context, replacing its traditional meaning.

Data 3-5 presents response posts from a fan who has been waiting for their idol's return to the entertainment industry after a ten-year hiatus, using the greeting *okaerinasai*. Traditionally, *okaerinasai* is used to welcome someone returning home. However, in this context, the 'home' referenced is not a physical residence, but rather the environment of the entertainment industry, where the band is active. When used in social media posts or cyberspace, the boundaries of space become blurred. The

meaning of 'home' has shifted from being a physical dwelling to referring to the environment where idols and fans interact—namely, the entertainment industry. While 'home' traditionally denotes a place to live, typically a physical structure, the entertainment world lacks a physical form. It is instead a space where individuals engage in activities for entertainment. In this context, 'home' can be understood as synonymous with 'fans,' meaning the idol's return to the entertainment world is essentially a return to the fans' side, where they provide entertainment.



11:39 PM · 03 Nov 24 · 8 Views

Data 3-4 (posts by @reno-guitarlife) :

“みんなただいま。10年振りにまた会いましょう。ViViD Gt.RENO

“*Minna tadaima. 10nen buri ni mata aimashou. ViViD Gt.RENO*”

“Everybody, I’m home. Let’s meet again after 10 years. ViViD Gt.RENO”

Data 3-5 (Response to data 3-4 by @KIYOKA92672205) :

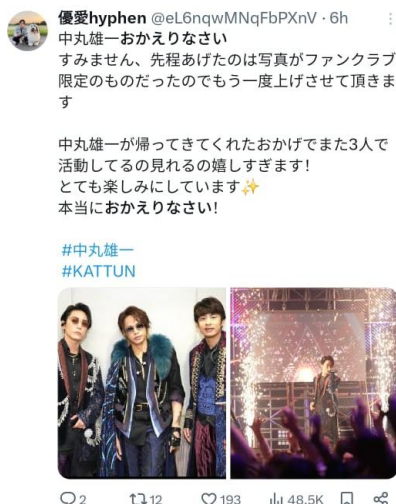
“おかえりなさい。ただ、ただ嬉しいです\*泣く”

“*Okaerinasai. Tada, tada ureshii desu \*naku*”

“Welcome home. I’m just so happy \*crying.”

### Data 3-6

Based on the content of the post in Data 3-6, it can be concluded that Nakamaru Yuuichi, a member of the Japanese boyband KAT-TUN, had temporarily left the group's activities before returning. In the post, the phrase *okaerinasai* is used to welcome Nakamaru Yuuichi back to the group's activities. This usage illustrates how the function of 'welcoming home' has evolved, now serving to welcome a member back to the group after a prolonged absence from its activities. In this context, 'home' metaphorically refers to the group membership that has been maintained over time, so the return of a member to the group is equated with returning home. Additionally, the writer’s perspective is that of a fan who is welcoming the idol back to the entertainment world.



“中丸雄一おかえりなさい  
すみません、先程あげたのは写真がファンクラブ限定なものだったのでもう一度上げさせていただきます。  
中丸雄一が帰ってきてくれたおかげでまた3人で活動してるの見えるの嬉しすぎます。  
とても楽しみにしています  
本当におかえりなさい!”

“Nakamaru Yuuichi *okaerinasai*.

*Sumimasen, sakihodo ageta no wa fankurabu gentei no mono datta node mou ichido agesasete itadakimasu.*

*Nakamaru Yuuichi ga kaette kite kureta okagede mata 3 nin de katsudou shiteru no mireru no ureshisugimasu.*

*Totemo tanoshimi ni shite imasu.*

*Hontou ni okaerinasai.* ”

"Welcome home Nakamaru Yuichi.

I'm sorry, the photo I uploaded earlier was only for the fan club, so I'll upload it again.

I'm so happy to see the three of us working together again thanks to Nakamaru Yuichi's return.

I'm really looking forward to it.

**Welcome home!"**

### Data 3-7

Data 3-6 presents a post by the official Japanese account of the popular Korean boy group SHINee, welcoming the return of their members from military service. The phrase *okaerinasai* is used to greet the idols' return to the entertainment world. Although these idols hold significant influence in the entertainment industry, they are prohibited from participating in entertainment activities while undergoing military service and must focus on fulfilling their service obligations. In the post, the idol (name: Minho) had been away from his fans for 18 months. To celebrate and welcome his return, the phrase *okaerinasai* is employed. In this context, the meaning of 'home' refers not to a physical residence but to the fan community and the entertainment world, signaling a shift in the phrase's meaning. For the Japanese, the concept of

'home' does not always refer to a place of residence, but rather to a space or community in which one has engaged for an extended period. Just as one can become 'home' for another person, this notion also applies in contexts such as the one described above.



"2020 MINHO'S BACK! \*Fire.

おかえりなさい #ミンホ! \*emoticon

これからミンホと同じ景色を見ながら、ミンホやSHINeeへの応援をよろしくお願いします。"

SHINee WORLD Jのみなさんへのメッセージが届きました!

"2020 MINHO'S BACK! \*Fire

*Okaerinasai* #Minho! \*emoticon

*Korekara mo Minho to onaji keshiki wo minagara, Minho ya SHINee e no ouen wo yoroshiku onegaishimasu.*

*SHINee WORLD J no minasan e no messeeji ga todokimashita!"*

"2020 MINHO'S BACK! \*Fire

**Welcome Home** #Minho! \*emoticon

Please continue to support Minho and SHINee while looking at the same scenery as Minho.

We have received a message for SHINee WORLD J!"

### Data 3-8

The post in question is from an account named @\_\_\_\_yuta\_317, which features a photo of an idol, Tamamori, taken from Instagram. In this post, the crying emoticon does not convey sadness, but rather a sense of being moved, as the idol has returned to his previous hairstyle. The greeting *okaerinasai* is used to signify the welcoming of something positively, typically indicating the return of something eagerly awaited. However, in this instance, *okaerinasai* is applied in reference to a hairstyle, as indicated by the mention of 前髪 (maegami, 'bangs') before the greeting. The accompanying caption, '久しぶりの前髪だ' (hisashiburi no maegami da, 'bangs after a long time'), indirectly suggests that the idol had previously worn bangs but had not done so for a considerable period. This use of '*okaerinasai*' in relation to the hairstyle suggests that

the greeting can also be employed to welcome back something, such as a style, that has not been used for a long time. Consequently, it can be inferred that 'home' in this context refers to a style that had been previously abandoned but has now been revived. While greetings typically require an interactional partner, as they serve a phatic function, in this case, 'okaerinasai' is used as a response to the return of something after a prolonged absence. Furthermore, the greeting is not used as a direct response to the trigger expression *tadaima* which would ordinarily prompt the use of *okaerinasai*.



“た、たま、玉森くん \*泣く 前髪おかえりなさい \*泣く  
 \*泣く 大好きな前髪 \*泣く  
 “ta, tama, Tamamori-kun \*naku maegami **okaerinasai** \*naku  
 \*naku daisukina maegami \*naku”  
 “ta, tama, Tamamori-kun \*crying **welcome home** bangs \*crying  
 \*crying My favourite bangs \*crying”

## CONCLUSION

Based on the data presented, it is evident that there has been a shift in the function and meaning of the greetings *tadaima* and *okaerinasai* in social media posts on X, written by Japanese speakers. The analysis reveals that the use of these two greeting expressions has undergone notable variations, particularly in the context of social media. The concepts of "Space" and "Target" are crucial for understanding this transformation, as greetings on social media are directed at a different "target" compared to those used in face-to-face interactions. The data also show that *tadaima* and *okaerinasai*, which are traditionally used as reciprocal greetings, with *tadaima* serving as the initiating expression, are not always exchanged face-to-face as in the past. Notably, *okaerinasai* is often employed in response to a post that does not explicitly contain the word *tadaima*. Posts containing *tadaima* are typically met with *okaerinasai* in the reply section, illustrating a shift in the conventional usage patterns of these greetings.

In this context, the terms *tadaima* and *okaerinasai* no longer refer to a physical home as a place of residence. Instead, they come to symbolize a social environment or community where one feels a sense of "home" or "return." Although individuals may not be returning to a physical dwelling, these expressions signify their return to specific realms, such as the entertainment industry, or to activities, styles, or cultural

practices that have not been engaged with for an extended period, yet are now regarded as "home" by their fans and the broader entertainment community. This shift in meaning reflects a broader change in how the concept of "home" is understood in a digital and virtual context, where physical space is no longer the sole domain that can be considered home. In the realms of entertainment and social media, "home" increasingly refers to a virtual environment or community characterized by social interaction and entertainment, which serves as a focal point for activity and identity for individuals, fans, and communities alike.

## RECOMMENDATION

This study presents evidence that when used in non-formal contexts, there is a shift in the function of *aisatsu*, particularly *tadaima* and *okaerinasai* as discussed in this study. However, in the future, it will also be important to examine the factors that cause the shift in function and meaning, to complement the sociolinguistic aspect of this study. Then in the field of sociolinguistics, we can also study how the use of *aisatsu* in the younger generation compares with the previous generation, and how the environment, social backgrounds and education influences the differences in the use of *aisatsu*.

## Author Contributions

**Jayanti, NK Tri : JNKT, K Artawa :KA, & KW Purnawati : KWP. Conceptualization, original draft preparation, writing : JNKT ; Methodology, validation, supervision : KA, KWP.**

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## Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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