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Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society (1981), pp. 222-235

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The Annual Proceedings of the Berkeley Linguistics Society is published online via [eLanguage](#), the Linguistic Society of America's digital publishing platform.

THE NOTION OF GIVENNESS AND
THE USE OF PRONOUNS AND ELLIPSIS*

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Chafe (1976) has characterized the notion of givenness in terms of the notion of consciousness, stating that "given information is that knowledge which the speaker assumes to be in the consciousness of the addressee at the time of the utterance," and that "new information is what the speaker assumes he is introducing into the addressee's consciousness by what he says."

The present study is an attempt to further examine the linguistic significance of the notion of givenness as defined in terms of the notion of consciousness. I will first discuss the question of what givenness is, and then, through the analysis of English and Japanese texts,¹ I will attempt to account for the use of pronouns in English and ellipsis in Japanese in terms of givenness.

What Is Givenness?

There have been different uses of the notion of givenness in different linguistic theories. One definition which is often seen in the literature is based on such notions as recoverability and focus. Another definition characterizes the notion of givenness in terms of "consciousness." Although the latter use is my concern in the present study, I would first like to discuss briefly the notion of givenness as defined in terms of "recoverability" and to point out that this notion and the one which I will be talking about in this paper are to be distinguished from each other.

Halliday (1967, 1970), for example, has characterized givenness on the basis of recoverability. He defines the constituent specified as new as "non-derivable information, either cumulative to or contrastive with what has preceded," and states that what is given is information which is recoverable anaphorically or situationally.

- (1) Jóhn painted the shed yesterday.
- (2) John painted the shed yesterday.

For example, in (1), Jóhn, which is the focus of information and is assigned phonological prominence, is said to be new because the implied question in (1) is "Who painted the shed yesterday?" and Jóhn is non-recoverable from this implied question. Other constituents in (1) are said to be given. In (2), on the other hand, painted

is said to be new, and the remaining constituents to be given, the implied question being "What did John do to the shed yesterday?"

What is involved here is the value of the information conveyed by an element or elements of a sentence. That is, the element(s) in question may convey either given(or old) or new information, depending upon whether it is informative to the addressee or not. And whether the element(s) is informative or not depends on the implied question, or more appropriately, on the knowledge of a certain proposition that is assumed to be shared by the speaker and the addressee.²

The notion of givenness which I will discuss here, on the other hand, involves the status of each item in a discourse. To avoid confusion, from now on, instead of the term 'given-new information,' I will use the terms 'given' and 'non-given' to refer to the status (i.e., givenness) of items, and the term 'old-new information' to refer to the value (i.e., oldness or newness) of the information conveyed by an element or elements of a sentence.

Thus, I would like to say that, regarding each item in a discourse, the speaker makes a judgment with respect to whether it is 'given' or 'non-given,' depending upon whether or not he assumes that it is in the addressee's consciousness at the time of the utterance. As will be seen, in English the choice between the use of a pronoun and a full noun phrase or between the use of a verb and a proform of that verb reflects the speaker's judgment about the givenness of the item. The question is, what kind of items in a discourse are regarded as 'given,' or are assumed to be in the addressee's consciousness? Usually, things in the conversational situation and items mentioned in the immediately preceding discourse are considered 'given,' or are assumed to be in the addressee's consciousness.

(3) Whose car is this?

(4) I told you to finish the homework first.

For example, in (3) and (4), the items referred to by the underlined pronouns are 'given' because they are present in the conversational situation. (This is explained in detail in Chafe (1976).)

(5) 1. Okay, there's a farmer. 2. He looks like a Chicano American. 3. He is picking pears.

:

4. A little boy comes by on his bicycle. 5. He sees that there are baskets of pears there.

:

6. Meanwhile, there are three little boys, up on the road a little bit, 7. and they see this little accident.

:(a story about the boy and
:the three boys)

8. And then he (i.e., the boy on a bicycle) goes off, 9. and that's the end of that story. 10. But then it goes back to the farmer. 11. Finally, he comes down from his tree. 12. He looks at the baskets.

In (5), the item referred to by the pronoun he in Sentence 2 is 'given' because it has been mentioned in the immediately preceding sentence and is assumed to still be in the addressee's consciousness when Sentence 2 is uttered. For the same reason, all the items referred to by the underlined pronouns in (5) are 'given.'

When an item is mentioned for the first time in a discourse (whether the mention is definite or indefinite),³ or when it is mentioned again in the same discourse after a sufficient interval (bearing a definiteness marker in this case), it is regarded as 'non-given.' For example, in (5), the items referred to by the noun phrases a farmer in Sentence 1, a little boy in 4, baskets in 5 and three little boys in 6 are 'non-given' because they are mentioned for the first time in the discourse. The items referred to by the noun phrases the farmer in Sentence 10 and the baskets in 12 are also 'non-given.' They are not the first mention of these items in (5); they have been talked about previously in the same discourse. However, in Sentences 10 and 12, they are no longer 'given' because they have not been mentioned in the discourse immediately preceding 10 and 12 and are thus assumed to have gone out of the addressee's consciousness by the time 10 and 12 are uttered.

An item which has been mentioned in an earlier sentence, but not in the immediately preceding sentence, may also be assumed to be in the addressee's consciousness. This may occur when the item is important to the discourse and has been talked about for a fairly long time in the preceding discourse, and/or when the intervening sentences in which the item in question is not mentioned are short and/or are not important to the discourse.

- (6) ... 1. He (i.e., the boy) puts the bushel basket on the front of his bike, 2. and he drives off with it. 3. He's driving along this road. 4. That's, uh, it's not paved. 5. It's just sort of a dirt road, 6. and it's sort of jutting. 7. And so he's driving along, and

riding his bike along, 8. and he sees another person coming toward him, 9. and it's another little white girl with long braids, brown hair. 10. And he's paying attention to her as she passes him.

In (6), the boy referred to in Sentence 7 is treated as 'given,' although he has not been talked about in the immediately preceding sentence. There are in fact three sentences before Sentence 7 in which the boy is not mentioned. He is, however, treated as 'given' because he is one of the important characters, talked about at length earlier in the story, and because the intervening sentences are not essential to the story. The boy mentioned in Sentence 10 in (6) is also regarded as 'given' because there is only one intervening sentence and because he is important to the story.

As I noted earlier, it is the speaker who makes the judgment about the givenness of items. Thus, this judgment may not always be appropriate. That is, due to his egocentricity, the speaker may fail to make a correct assessment of the state of the addressee's consciousness. In such a case, the judgment reflects the speaker's consciousness, and the expression of givenness becomes inappropriate.

- (7) 1. Okay, there's a farmer. 2. He looks like a Chicano American. 3. He is picking pears, 4. and he's just picking them. 5. He comes off of the ladder, 6. and he puts his pears into the basket. 7. A number of people are going by, 8. and one is, you know, I don't know, 9. I can't remember the first thing that, the first person that goes by. 10. Oh, a man with a goat comes by. 11. It seems to be a busy place. 12. You know, fairly busy. 13. It's out in the country, maybe in the valley or something. 14. And, he (i.e., the farmer) goes up the ladder, 15. and picks some more pears.

In (7), with the pronoun he in Sentence 14, the speaker is referring to the farmer. When Sentence 14 is uttered, it is probably the case that the addressee is not thinking of the farmer any more. However, this character is treated as 'given' because he is what the speaker is thinking of. In the same way, in (8) following, the boy on a bike referred to in Sentence 10 is considered to be 'given.' Inappropriate judgments like these are likely to occur in unplanned discourse because the speaker does not have enough time to consider the state of the addressee's consciousness.

- (8) ... 1. And he (i.e., the boy on a bike) looks around for the hat, 2. doesn't watch where he's going, 3. and hits a big rock in the road, 4. all the pears fall down. 5. And then there's a shot of three kids, sort of standing by the roadside, 6. and you don't know at first whether they're hostile or not, 7. and you get a shot. 8. Then they're sort of standing there, grinning. 9. and it could, that could be interpreted as a menacing grin, or a friendly grin, or just the way kids are, 10. and they go over to him (i.e., the boy on the bike).

I would now like to discuss briefly the relationship between givenness of items and the oldness or newness of information. It is often the case that a 'given' item conveys 'old information,' and a 'non-given' item conveys 'new information.'

- (9) Who did this? (referring to the broken window)
John did it.
(10) This is a library.

For example, in (9), the referents of did this in the question and did it in the answer are 'given,' and these words convey 'old information.' The referent of John in the answer, on the other hand, is 'non-given,' and John conveys 'new information.' Again, in (10), the item referred to by the demonstrative this is 'given,' and this conveys 'old information,' whereas the idea of a library is 'non-given,' and a library conveys 'new information.'

This relationship, however, does not always hold. In other words, a 'given' item may convey 'new information,' and a 'non-given' item may convey 'old information.'

- (11) Who took out the garbage?
I did.
(12) This is the library.

In (11), what is referred to by took out the garbage is 'non-given,' but the words convey 'old information.' On the other hand, the referent of the pronoun I in the answer is 'given,' but I conveys 'new information.' Or, in (12), the referent of the demonstrative this is 'given,' but this conveys 'new information,' whereas the referent of the library is 'non-given,' but the library conveys old information.

Givenness of Items and the Use of Pronouns and Ellipsis

In what follows, English and Japanese texts will be analyzed to compare the way givenness is expressed in the two languages. I stated earlier that in English a 'given' item is expressed by a pronoun or the proform of a verb, and a 'non-given' item is expressed by a full noun phrase or a verb. In the case of Japanese, on the other hand, a 'given' item is often (but not always) subject to ellipsis, and a 'non-given' item is expressed by a full noun phrase or a verb.

- (13) 1. Otoko no hito desu ka, noofu-san ga ki no tokoro de yoonashi o totte iru wake nan desu.
 2. Sorede ne, ano, mittsu, kago ni mittsu gurai totta wake desu ne. 3. De, mada, ano, nobotte totteru wake nan desu.
 :
 4. De, soko no tokoro ni kodomo ga, ano, chii-sai shoogakkoo gurai no ko ga jitensha de kite,
 5. de, hitotsu no kago o totte ttchau n desu ne. 6. Sorede, ittchau n desu ne.
 : (a story about the boy and
 : three boys)
 7. Soko no tokoro de choodo noofu-san ga, ano, ki no ue kara orite kite, 8. sorede, yoonashi no hako o miru n desu. 9. Soosuru to hitotsu tarinai wake nan desu.
1. A man, a farmer is picking pears on a tree.
 2. And, (he) has picked three basketful. 3. And (he) is still picking (them), going up (the tree).
 :
 4. Then, there came a kid, a little shool boy, riding a bike, 5. and (he) took one of the baskets, 6. and (he) went off.
 : (a story about the boy and
 : three boys)
 7. There, the farmer came down from the tree,
 8. and (he) looked at the pear-boxes. 9. Then, one of (them) is missing.

In (13), there is no explicit reference to the farmer in Sentence 2. (In the English translation, ellipted items are put in parentheses.) The farmer in Sentence 2 in (13) is 'given' because he has been mentioned in Sentence 1. In the same way, the farmer in Sentences 3 and 8, the pears in 2 and 3, the tree in 3, the boy in 5 and 6, and the pear-boxes in 9 are 'given' and are not expressed.

On the other hand, the farmer, the tree and the pears in Sentence 1, and the boy in 4, are 'non-given' because they are mentioned for the first time in the discourse. Thus, they are expressed by noun phrases. The farmer and the tree in Sentence 7 and the pears in 8 are also 'non-given' and are expressed by noun phrases. Although these mentions are not the first mentions in the discourse, their referents are considered to be 'non-given' because they have not been talked about in the discourse immediately preceding Sentences 7 and 8.

Although I have up to this point said that, in English, a 'given' item is expressed by a pronoun, and that, in Japanese, it is subject to ellipsis, this is not always the case. As Chafe (1976) has pointed out, when the speaker thinks that the use of a pronoun or ellipsis may cause ambiguity or misinterpretation of the identity of the referent, its use is avoided even when the item in question is considered 'given.'

A possibility of ambiguity or misinterpretation as to the referent of a pronoun or the ellipted item arises when there are two or more 'given' items that are candidates for the referent slot in question. Comparing pronouns and ellipsis, the number of candidates for the referent is more restricted in the case of a pronoun because a pronoun, but not an ellipsis, provides a certain amount of information about the referent, such as its number and person.

Thus, in the case of English, the possibility of ambiguity or misinterpretation as to the referent of a pronoun arises only when there are two or more 'given' items that are the same with respect to the features marked by the pronoun. However, even when there are two or more 'given' items that have the same features, the use of a pronoun may not always cause ambiguity or misinterpretation. When there is no change in the grammatical relations of the items in question in two succeeding sentences, pronouns may be used in the second sentence even when there are two or more 'given' items with the same features.

- (14) ... 1. One of them (i.e., the three boys) whistles back to the guy on the bicycle, 2. "Here's your hat," 3. or he, I don't know, 4. and he goes and takes it.

In (14), when the underlined pronoun he is uttered, there are two 'given' items, one of the three boys and the guy on the bicycle. Rather than a noun phrase, however, the pronoun he is used to refer to one of the three boys because he is the referent of the subjects of both the sentence in question and the preceding sentence.

Ambiguity or misinterpretation as to the referent

of a pronoun is, then, most likely to arise when there are two or more 'given' items that are the same with respect to the features marked by the pronoun, as well as when there is a change in the grammatical relations in two succeeding sentences. In such cases, the 'given' items are expressed by noun phrases, rather than by pronouns.

- (15) ...1. And then one of the boys finds the hat, lying on the road. 2. And then he whistles at the boy on the bicycle, 3. and the boy on the bicycle stops.
- (16) ...1. A little boy on a bicycle who's coming by. 2. And so he starts coming by, 3. and he ends up stopping where the pears are, 4. and looks up at the man who's up the ladder, 5. and the man doesn't know that the little boy is there.
- (17) ...1. So he (i.e., the boy on a bike) takes the whole basket, 2. and puts it near his bike, 3. lifts up the bike, 4. puts the basket on the front part of his bicycle.

In (15), when Sentence 3 is uttered, there are two 'given' items, one of the boys and the boy on the bicycle; they are 'given' because they have been talked about in the immediately preceding sentence. In Sentence 3, the referent of the subject, that is, the boy on the bicycle, is expressed by a noun phrase. The use of the pronoun he is avoided because its referent is most likely to be understood as the other 'given' item, one of the boys, that is the referent of the subject in the preceding sentence. In the same way, in (16) and (17), the referents of the underlined noun phrases are 'given' at the time of the utterance, but they are expressed by noun phrases rather than by pronouns because pronouns might cause ambiguity or, more likely, misinterpretation.

As I noted above, pronouns provide some information about their referents. Thus, even when there is a change in the grammatical relations of the items in question in two successive sentences, pronouns may be used if the features of the referents with which they are associated are not the same.

- (18) ... 1. And he (i.e., the farmer) sees these three boys approaching, 2. and they're eating pears, 3. and they walk off into the distance, 4. and he's sitting there with a puzzled look on his face.
- (19) ... 1. He (i.e., the boy on a bike) comes across another bicyclist. 2. It's a young woman, 3.

- and for some reason she catches his attention, 4. and he's turning his head behind him, looking at her.
- (20) ... 1. And he's (i.e., the boy on a bike) riding down the road, 2. and he had a hat on, 3. and he almost ran into a girl, 4. and somehow she took his hat, not on purpose, 5. but it came off. 6. So he goes, and looked around.

For example, in (18), when Sentence 2 is uttered, there are two 'given' items, the farmer and the three boys. Since they differ in number, the pronoun they is used to refer to the three boys, although there is a change in grammatical relations between Sentence 2 and the preceding sentence. In the same manner, the underlined pronouns in (18), (19) and (20) are used in spite of the existence of more than one 'given' item at that point in the narrative.

I would now like to turn to the case of Japanese. As I mentioned above, since ellipses convey no information about their referents, when there are two or more 'given' items, their use may cause ambiguity as to their referents. However, as was the case in English, when there is no change in the grammatical relations of the items in question in two succeeding sentences, ellipses may be used in the second sentence even when there are two or more 'given' items.

- (21) ... 1. (Otoko no ko ga) jitensha ni notte ittchattara, 2. jitensha ni notta onna no ko to surechigatte, 3. sore ni mitorete, 4. sorede, ishi ni tsumazuite,

... 1. When (the boy) was riding the bike, 2. (he) passed by a girl who was riding a bike, 3. and (he) was watching it, 4. and (he) tripped on a rock.

For example, in (21), when Sentence 3 is uttered, there are two 'given' items, the boy and the girl. However, the boy that is the referent of the subject in Sentence 3 is not expressed because he is also the referent of the subject in the preceding sentence.

When there is a change in the grammatical relations of the items in question in the two sentences, the use of ellipses for the 'given' items is usually avoided, and noun phrases or pronouns⁴ are used instead.

- (22) ... 1. De, sono sannin-gumi no hitori ga otoko no booshi o motte sono otoko no ko no ato oikakete, 2. soshitara, sono koronda otoko no ko

wa, mangoo o mittsu ka na, mittsu o sono otoko no ko ni oree to shite watashite,

... 1. So one of the three boys, holding the boy's hat, chased the boy. 2. Then, the boy who fell over gave the boy three mangoes to thank (him).

In (22), for example, at the time Sentence 2 is uttered, there are two 'given' items, one of the three boys and the boy who fell over. The speaker refers to both of them by noun phrases because their grammatical relations in 2 differ from those in 1.

As we have seen in Examples (18), (19) and (20), in the case of English, even when there is a change in the grammatical relations of the 'given' items, pronouns may be used if the features of the referents with which they are associated are not the same. In the case of Japanese, on the other hand, since ellipses do not convey any information, when there is a change in the grammatical relations of the items in two succeeding sentences, the use of ellipsis is usually avoided, even when the items in question differ from each other in such features as number and person.

(23) ... 1. Ano, kondo, sono, mangoo o totte ita ojisan ga ki no shita ni orite mitara, 2. sono, hito-kago-goto zenbu dokka ni nakunatte ite, 3. "okashii naa," to omotte koo kangaekonde ita tokoro e, 4. sono sannin-gumi no otoko no ko ga mangoo o kajiri nagara sono otoko no hito no mae o toorisugite itte, 5. sono otoko no hito wa, "mm, chotto ayashii na," to omoi nagara sono kodomo-tachi no ushiro sugata o mite ita.

... 1. Uh, next, the man who was picking mangoes came down from the tree, 2. then, one of the baskets is missing, 3. so (he) thinks, "(It's) funny," 4. then the three boys, eating the mangoes, passed by in front of the man. 5. The man, thinking, "(That's) funny," watches the back of the kids.

(24) ... 1. Otoko no ko ga dondon inaka-michi o hashitte iku to, 2. hantai-gawa kara onna no ko ga yahari jitensha ni notte yatte kuru. 3. Otoko no ko wa, onna no ko no hoo ni ki o torarete iru to, 4. surechigai-zama ni michi ni atta koichi ni tsumazuite, 5. jitensha-goto taorete shimau.

... 1. When the boy was riding on the country road, 2. a girl, also riding a bike, came in the opposite direction. 3. The boy was paying attention to the girl, 4. and tripped on a rock on the road, 5. and fell over with the bike.

In (23), the two 'given' items in Sentence 5, that is, the man and the kids, differ from each other in number, but they are expressed by noun phrases because the use of ellipsis may cause ambiguity. The same thing can be said of the underlined noun phrases in Example (24).

It is, however, not always the case that the use of ellipsis in Japanese is avoided when there is a change in the grammatical relations of the items in question in the two successive sentences. When there is a factor that clarifies the identity of the referent, ellipsis may be used even under these circumstances. One such factor is the context of the discourse. Another factor is the form of the verb in the sentence, such as the use or non-use of an honorific form.

(25) Taroo: 1. Okaasan datte itta daro, 2. obaachan wa chotto asobi ni kita dake da tte.

Haha: 3. Taroo!

Taroo: 4. Ore, iya da yo, shiranani hito ga zutto uchi ni iru nan te.

Chichi: 5. Shiranai hito to wa nan da. 6.

Omae no obaasan nan da zo.

Taroo: 7. Datte, shiranai n da mon.

Taroo: 1. Even mom (i.e., you) said so, (didn't you,) 2. that granny was just here for a short visit?

Mother: 3. Taroo!

Taroo: 4. I won't have (it), a stranger living here from now on!

Father: 5. A stranger? 6. (She) is your grandmother.

Taroo: 7. But (I) don't know (her).

For example, in (25), the two 'given' items in Sentence 7 are not expressed, although there is a change in grammatical relations between Sentences 6 and 7. This appears to be possible because, from the context, the referents are considered obvious.

(26) 1. Nee, okaasan ni sukoshi uchi no koto tetsu-datte itadaita hoo ga ii kashira. 2. Demo, ammari onegai-shite mo, 3. kokitsukatte iru mitai da shi, 4. to itte nani mo nasaranaide kudasai to yuu to, 5. jamamono atsukai-shiteru

yoo ni o-tori ni naru mitai dashi.

1. (I'm) wondering if (it) would improve things if (I) got (your) mother to help around the house a little. 2. Of course, if (I) ask (her) to do too much, 3. (it) would make (it) look as though (I) were working (her) like a slave, 4. but on the other hand, if (I) told (her), "Please don't do anything," 5. (she) might take (it) to mean that (I) am treating (her) like a nuisance.

In Sentence 5 in (26), the 'given item' in question is not expressed because it is not ambiguous from the context as well as from the honorific form of the verb (i.e., o-tori ni naru 'to take').

Earlier, I discussed the speaker's egocentricity in making judgments about the givenness of items. The speaker's judgment about the possibility of ambiguity or misinterpretation as to the referent of a pronoun or the ellipted item may also be egocentric, bringing about an inappropriate expression of givenness.

(27) ... 1. Sorede, mata booshi ga ochite iru no o sono sannin no naka no shoonen ga hitori mitsukete, 2. modotte kite, 3. ageta tokoro, 4. moo yooi-shite ita mitai desu ne, 5. sanko gurai agenakya to yuu koto de, 6. sorede watashite,

... 1. Then, one of the three boys found a hat, 2. and (he) came back, 3. and (he) gave (it to the boy on the bike), 4. then (he - i.e., the boy on the bike) seemed to have prepared (the pears), 6. and (he) gave (them) (to one of the three boys).

In (27), the subject of Sentence 4 is not expressed. The speaker is talking about the boy on the bike, which, however, may not be clear for the addressee because the referent of the subject in the preceding sentence is not the boy on the bike, and because the context is not helpful. The speaker, however, is using an ellipsis because for him the referent is not ambiguous.

In English also, even when there are two or more 'given' items that are the same with respect to such features as number and person, and when there is a change in the grammatical relations in two successive sentences, the speaker may sometimes use pronouns if he thinks that the referents are not ambiguous in context. The addressee, however, may not always be able to follow such pronoun usages. A case of this is shown in Example (28).

- (28) ... 1. Then a little boy on a bicycle comes riding past the tree, 2. and sort of goes past the pears in the baskets, 3. and then stops, 4. and looks up at the guy in the tree, 5. he (i.e., the guy in the tree) is still on the ladder, 6. and he is not watching him (i.e., the little boy), 7. so he (i.e., the little boy) puts his bike down, 8 he walks over.

It thus appears, then, that the use of a pronoun or ellipsis is avoided when it is thought it might cause ambiguity or misinterpretation as to the referent. In addition, there seem to be other circumstances under which the use of a pronoun or ellipsis is avoided. For example, when the item to be expressed is a concept related to the 'given' item in question (e.g., a concept in a frame), a pronoun or ellipsis can not be used. Or, in the case of Japanese, when the 'given' item conveys new information, it must be mentioned. These factors, however, must await further study.

Footnotes

*I am grateful to the people who read the earlier versions of this paper and gave me helpful comments, especially, Wallace Chafe, Haruo Aoki, Pamela Downing and P.J. Mistry.

¹The sources of the examples used in this paper are as follows: Examples (1) and (2) are from Halliday (1967). Examples (5)-(8), (13)-(24), (27) and (28) are part of the data from Chafe's project. Except for (24), all are drawn from oral narratives. Examples (25) and (26) are taken from the script of a T.V. drama called "Tonari no Shibafu."

²Chomsky (1971) used the terms 'presupposition' and 'focus' in the sense of 'given-new information' under discussion.

³The notion of givenness is distinct from that of definiteness. Like the notion of givenness, that of definiteness involves the status (i.e., definiteness) of each item in a discourse. However, whether the item is definite or not depends on whether it is identifiable for the addressee or not.

⁴A noun phrase may sometimes be used for a 'given' item when the use of even a pronoun may still cause ambiguity. In other cases, the use of a pronoun may be avoided, due to the fact that in Japanese pronouns carry connotations of respectfulness, politeness, etc.

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