

PRAGMATICS IN THE SEMANTIC DESCRIPTION
OF THE VERBS OF 'GIVING'

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ABSTRACT

The meaning of certain utterances is not entirely given by the interpretations of the syntactic and semantic features which are extracted from related linguistic structures. Rather, it is derived from the contexts of discourse in which these utterances are put to use. The verbs of 'giving' in Japanese represent exactly such a phenomena. I will discuss some of the intricate semantic characteristics of these verbs to show that their full description requires a set of pragmatic rules which can define the whole range of relevant contexts for the verbs of 'giving' and account for their meanings in these contexts. It will also be demonstrated that these rules of use will properly constitute part of the semantic description in as much as they can capture some linguistic insight which might be missed without consideration of the pragmatic elements in the context of discourse.

Current status of the linguistic study of meaning. The linguistic study of meaning has been delimited either by the overt concern or the lack of concern with the mental processes of relating linguistic signs to meaning. In a competence model grammar, interpretive semantics defines sentence meanings as a product of the interpretations of lexical meanings and the deep structure (now the surface structure as well) syntactic relations alone. Subsequently, intricate semantic processes by which meanings of a given sentence of linguistic symbols are comprehended, are explained without reference to the communication processes by which the linguistic symbols are put to use in appropriate contexts. This aspect of the study of meaning has been attributed as properly belonging to the domain of the study of 'performance'. Lately, however, linguists of the mentalistic school have come up with evidence that full interpretation of the meanings of words and sentences often require not only semantic and syntactic information (C. Fillmore 1971, G. Lakoff 1971, R. Lakoff 1971) but information of the situational contexts in which those words and sentences are uttered, as well as the thoughts and thought processes of the speaker. Thus, such pragmatic notions as intention, presupposition, purpose and so on are finding their way into the semantic study of meaning (R. Kempson 1975). As more evidence is presented of constant interaction of meaning and context through language use, the rigid separation between pragmatics and semantics is gradually diminishing.

Theory of the 'context of situation'. Meaning and context have never been separated from each other in the study of language as a

-T3-

means of communication. The concept of the 'context of situation' has developed, in association with the particular concern with language in use through communication, closely following the guiding principles that "the meaning of a word is in its use in the language" (Wittgenstein p. 20^e), and that speech "is meaningless without the context of the activity in which it is enveloped" (Malinowski p. 8). In conjunction with the narrow view of language being an instrument of action or a type of social activity, the theory of the 'context of situation' has been cast in a predominantly behavioristic or non-mentalistic framework.

Through Firth's insight, the 'context of situation' has been institutionalized as a linguistic concept and has developed from the simple definition of "activity" (Malinowski 1935) to a theoretical schemata for describing the contexts in terms of such notional components as participants, verbal and non-verbal actions of the participants, physical environments of an utterance, and the interrelations of these components. Such contexts can subsequently be related to various contextual frameworks of more general nature such as social structures of the societies of which the participants are members, various types of discourse, relations and status among the participants and so on. Firthian theory of the 'context of situation' would have yielded a fairly exhaustive account of physical and socio-cultural contexts of utterances. What has weakened his theory, however, was a total exclusion of mentalistic elements from the description of contexts. While engaging in a linguistic activity in communication, the speaker is constantly analyzing the context of situation on his

own terms, and quite often the mental activities of this nature crucially determine the interpretation of the meaning of his utterances. The theory of the 'context of situation' is, therefore, severely restricted from providing for this aspect of the contextual meanings.

This paper's concern. In the following sections, I will demonstrate that the semantic meaning of the verbs of 'giving' in Japanese requires some descriptive scheme which is far beyond the scope of interpretive semantics and the theory of 'context of situation'.

(1) First, the semantic characteristics of the 'give' verbs in English and in Japanese are briefly compared, (2) second, I will analyze some of the semantic characteristics specific to the Japanese 'give' verbs and, (3) third, on the basis of the findings from (2), I will conclude that a set of pragmatic rules which assign the verbs of 'giving' to the appropriate contexts are prerequisite for the semantic interpretation of any occurrence of the verb of 'giving'.

Comparison of English and Japanese verbs of 'giving'. English verbs of 'giving' are classifiable, according to Dixon (1973), in terms of nuclear and non-nuclear verb distinctions. The system of English verbs of 'giving' consists of one nuclear verb and a number of non-nuclear verbs which are included in the generic range of the meaning of the nuclear verb 'give'. Furthermore, non-nuclear verbs are divided into two classes by virtue of the two senses of the nuclear verb 'give': (1) contractual giving and (2) spontaneous giving. Thus non-nuclear verbs such as 'pay', 'sell', and 'lend' belong to one class via (1), and 'present', 'donate', and 'award' to the other via (2).

-T5-

There are no such superordinate-hypernym relationships in the verbs of 'giving' in Japanese. What correspond to the English non-nuclear verbs of 'giving', constitute separate verb systems of 'paying', 'selling', 'giving for charity', 'giving as a gift' and so on, and their meanings are outside the range of the generic meaning of the verb 'give'. That is to say, contrary to Dixon's expectation that nuclear and non-nuclear verbs are universal categories, such distinctions are irrelevant in describing the Japanese 'give' verbs.

While the English nuclear verb of 'giving' has the same semantic and syntactic features of the non-nuclear verbs, it is thus capable of replacing its hypernyms as in,

1. He pays three dollars to a gardener.
- 1.1 He gives three dollars to a gardener.
2. He donated a chapel to the city.
- 2.1 He gave a chapel to the city.

Japanese generic verbs of 'giving' are not interchangeable with other verbs of 'giving' which have their own semantic and syntactic characteristics independently of each other and of the generic 'give' verbs.

Furthermore, semantic characteristics of English 'give' verbs seem to be generally determined by the nature of the objects to be given. For example, 'paying' is paraphrasable as 'giving money', 'presenting' as 'giving for honoring', 'donating' as 'giving for charity', and etc. Whereas the meaning of the generic 'give' verbs in Japanese is not semantically sensitive to the objects to be given, it is entirely determined by the contextual relations of giver and receiver.

General semantic characteristics of Japanese 'give' verbs.

The generic verb of 'giving' in Japanese which corresponds to the English nuclear verb of 'giving', has four-way lexical realizations, that is, two sets of Give₁ and Give₂, each of which further divides into two stylistic variants. Give₁ and Give₂ share exactly the same range of generic meaning such as "transfer of ownership from one person to another" (Dixon p. 20). They are in complementary distribution. Give₁ occurs with the speaker or first person giver and non-first person receiver, and Give₂ with the non-first person giver and the speaker or first person receiver. I will simply generalize that Give₁ occurs with first person giver and Give₂ with first person receiver. For example,

3. I/we Give₁ to you, her, them or any 2nd or 3rd person NP.

4. you, she, they or any 2nd or 3rd person NP Give₂ to me/us.

Give₁ and Give₂ have unmarked and marked forms with respect to the relative status of the giver and receiver. Marked forms occur when the giver's status is higher than that of the speaker, and unmarked forms are neutral to status relations. Japanese verbs of 'giving' can now be represented in a context-feature matrix such as:

	1st person gives to y	y gives to 1st person
Unmarked for status	Give ₁ 'ageru'	Give ₂ 'kureru'
Marked for higher status	Give ₁ 'yaru'	Give ₂ 'kudasaru'

(I)

Give₁ and Give₂ with non-first person participants. Give₁ and Give₂ can occur in a full network of giver-receiver relations, and in fact,

-T7-

participants can consist entirely of non-first persons. In such instances, the basic co-occurrence relations which hold between Give₁ or Give₂ and first person, are unaltered and simply extended to non-first person participants. One of the non-first person participants is assigned the first person status by the speaker in accordance with the relative 'psychological' closeness between them. Then, any non-first person participant, once he is reinterpreted as a first person or a member of the speaker's in-group, plays the role of giver of Give₁ or of the receiver of Give₂. The speaker's interpretation of this closeness is governed to a certain degree by the socio-cultural norm unique to the Japanese society which places the speaker's family members and relatives at the top of the closeness scale, the hearer or audience in the discourse next, their kins, people better or favourably acquainted, people less or unfavourably acquainted, people unacquainted, and so on in descending order. For example, the second and third person participants are assigned the giver and receiver roles in the 'giving' situation such as in the following:

5. My father Give₁ to you
closer to the speaker
6. You Give₂ to my father
closer to the speaker
7. You Give₁ to our teacher
closer to the speaker
8. Our teacher Give₂ to you
closer to the speaker
9. Our teacher Give₁ to that old lady
closer to the speaker

Furthermore, the assimilation of the non-first person by the speaker as the first person equivalent is much more restricted with

-T8-

respect to the receiver role of Give₂ than to the giver role of Give₁. It appears that non-first person participants who stand in the range of less acquainted to unacquainted have no privilege of occurrence as the receiver of Give₂ such as,

*10. Our teacher Give₂ to that old dog
unacquainted to the speaker

*11. You Give₂ to that stranger
unacquainted to the speaker

except when they are in the physical range of discourse, i.e. among the audience. The following is therefore possible:

12. That old man Give₂ to this lady
unacquainted, but physically closer to
the speaker

The aforementioned scale of closeness thus provides only a very general principle and in practice the closeness measurement criterion may vary from one speaker to another and also from one situation to another.

Based on these observations, the feature matrix (I) can be modified as follows:

	1(2, 3) person gives to 2, 3 person	2, 3 person gives to 1(2, 3) person
Unmarked for status	Give ₁ 'ageru'	Give ₂ 'kureru'
Marked for higher status	Give ₁ 'yaru'	Give ₂ 'kudasaru'

(II)

Give₂ and the passive form of the English 'give' verb. From the giver-receiver relations in the 'giving' act as tabulated in the previous section, another unique characteristic of Japanese 'give' verbs can be extracted. Notice that the participant's roles of giver and receiver are reversed with regard to Give₁ and Give₂. Such

-T9-

semantic role changes also occur in the passivization of the English nuclear 'give' verb.

13. x gives to y
 giver receiver

14. x is given by y
 receiver giver

Now compare them with:

15. 1st-x Give₁ to y
 giver receiver

16. y Give₂ to 1st-x
 giver receiver

In conjunction with the syntactic fact that none of the Japanese generic verbs of 'giving' can be passivized, Give₁ and Give₂ may be assumed to be the lexical analogues of active and passive forms of the English generic verb of 'giving'. Based on this assumption, Give₁ and Give₂ constructions such as 15 and 16 can be semantically reinterpreted as the exact parallel to the corresponding English passive constructions.

13. x gives to y
 giver receiver

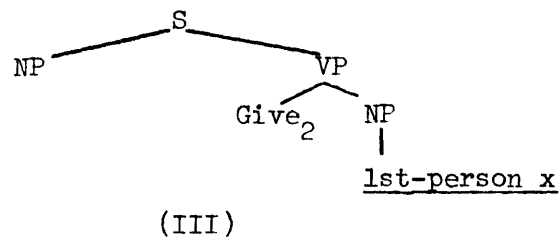
15. 1st-x Give₁ to y
 giver receiver

14. x is given by y
 receiver giver

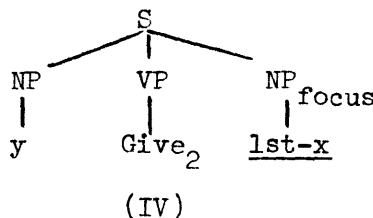
16. 1st-x Give₂ by y
 receiver giver

Now the main function of syntactic passivization is to move a NP out of the predicate structure of a sentence and assign it to the surface subject position, thereby bringing it into main focus for the corresponding semantic interpretation. If we consider that the

Japanese Give₂ is a lexical device of passivizing the 'give' verbs, the odd constraint on the receiver role of Give₂, being filled in only by the first person or the equivalent, can be explained as follows. In the act of 'giving', the speaker or the first person participant obviously plays a central, pragmatic role which requires that he should receive the main focus in every linguistic context. When the speaker or the first person participant is a receiver, however, he is structurally assigned to a lower level NP, hence failing to meet the contextual condition being in 'focus'.



Notice, however, that in the structure of VP, the presence of Give₂, which is, semantically, a passive 'give' verb, may achieve the same semantic effect on the entire construction as brought by syntactic passivization. As a result, the first person NP is now assigned to the focus NP position. For the purpose of illustration, the effect of lexical passivization is approximated as:



(Note: The diagrams in (III) and (IV) are to illustrate the most abstract structural relationships of the relevant constituents in the 'giving' constructions, and are by no means correlated with 'deep' and 'surface' structures. Language-particular constituent ordering, for example, is not represented in these diagrams.)

-T11-

Give₂ is not just an allomorph of the generic verb 'give', but this fact cannot be explained by semantic rules only. Give₁ and Give₂ have exactly the same generic meaning, and the distinction between them or the interpretation of the full meaning of Give₂ requires a set of pragmatic presuppositions about the non-linguistic context in which Give₂ must occur.

Likewise, active and passive construction in English, from a pragmatic viewpoint, are not merely stylistic variants. Although the selection of NP's which qualify as the surface subject of a passive construction of 'giving' in English are less severely delimited than the NP's to be focused in semantic passive construction in Japanese (refer to the tree diagram IV), the semantic effect of syntactic passivization and lexical passivization by Give₂ is the same, in that the particular NP receives greater attention in a given discourse than any other NP's in the same sentence. Semantically and syntactically, English and Japanese verbs of 'giving' share little in common, but pragmatic analysis of the verbs of 'giving' in light of their use in situational contexts has revealed that the passive form of the generic 'give' verb in English and Give₂ in Japanese are in fact related.

Stylistic variants of Give₁ and Give₂. Now we turn to the marked and unmarked forms of the verbs of 'giving'. They have been characterized with respect to the relative status of giver and receiver. The unmarked term is neutral to status and the marked term is sensitive to the higher status of the giver. This distinction, however, is a very tangible one in that the semantic boundary between them is often

-T12-

obscured in specific contexts. To a certain degree, relative status and relative closeness both follow a set of socially and culturally determined principles. General criteria for relative status are set up with respect to the participant's attributes such as age, social rank, intimacy, respectability, popularity, social importance, and so on unlike relative closeness which depends on 'psychological' distance between the speaker and the participants. In a very broad sense, the giver of the marked Give₁ and Give₂ can be described among many others as relatively unfamiliar, beneficial, popular to the speaker or as higher in social rank, older in age, more respectable, or more distinguished socially than the speaker. But general principles for determining the status of this sort are constantly violated by two factors: (1) the speaker's relation to his in-group members and (2) the speaker's consideration of the effect on the hearer or audience. As one of the consequences of (1), status evaluation is in inverse relationship with the closeness measurement, that is, the closer the giver is to the speaker, the less higher is his status relative to the speaker. For instance, people who are unfamiliar to the speaker and are the lowest on the closeness scale, are the highest on the status scale. The family members of the speaker who are at the highest on the closeness scale are the lowest on the status scale. For example,

17. That old lady Give₂ to us (Marked)

18. My father Give₂ to us (Unmarked)

Compare these sentences in which the giver is older in age than the speaker and, by general socio-cultural norm, is also higher in status than the speaker. In 18, this norm is broken. Since 'my father' is

-T13-

the speaker's in-group member, the higher status of the former becomes unmarked in status by the application of (1).

Now compare the following sentences:

19. My father Give₁ to that bloke (Marked)

20. I Give₁ to my father (Marked)

In 19, according to the observation we have made of sentence 18, the speaker's in-group member status should not be higher than that of a person unfamiliar to the speaker, but by general consensus, the 'bloke' personality is placed lower on the status scale. 19 is an instance in which the social norm supercedes the speaker's in-group relation, and the marked Give₁ is a linguistic manifestation of this fact. In sentence 20, 'giving' takes place between the speaker and his in-group member just as in 18. Since 'my father' is older and therefore higher in status than the giver, the unmarked form of Give₁ should occur. Yet reversal of relative status is due to factor (2), i.e. speaker's consideration of the effect on his audience. At first sight, it may look as if the raising of the speaker's status relative to that of his father is immodest, therefore giving a bad effect on the audience, but it is not so in traditional belief in Japanese society. Talking down about the speaker's own family is generally appreciated as good manners. Of course 20 may just as well be asserted in unmarked style such as:

20.1 I Give₁ to my father (Unmarked)

Sentence 20.1 may be interpreted as a slightly deviate utterance by the audience just in case they share the old, traditional belief, but in no way may cause semantic anomaly.

For the final illustrative examples, consider:

21. I Give₁ to a monkey in the zoo (Marked)

-T14-

22. I Give₁ to your pet monkey (Unmarked)

In inter-species 'giving' acts, humans are ontologically higher in status than non-human animals. The marked form of Give₁ in sentence 21 is therefore a linguistic testimony to this traditional belief. In 22, on the other hand, the relative status between the speaker and the 'monkey' is neutralized, since the 'monkey' is a pet to the hearer and the speaker is in full consideration of the effect on the hearer. Complex features of the situational contexts such as these which determine the marked and unmarked forms of Give₁ and Give₂ increase the semantic implication of the 'give' verbs over and above the generic meaning of 'giving'.

Summary. The characteristics of the Japanese verbs of 'giving' which have been investigated in this paper can be summarized as follows:

- 1) Generic 'give' verbs fall into two sets: Give₁ and Give₂. Give₁ and Give₂ share exactly the same generic meaning, therefore the semantic distinctions between them totally depend on the contexts in which they occur exclusively of each other.
- 2) Give₁ occurs with the first person giver and Give₂ with the first person receiver.
- 3) In the 'giving' situation between non-first person participants, one of them, who is psychologically the closest to the speaker, is taken into his in-group and assigned the first person status, thereby playing the giver role of Give₁ or the receiver role of Give₂.
- 4) Give₂ is semantically a passive verb whose main function is to bring the main character in the 'giving' act into the focus of discourse.

-T15-

5) Give₁ and Give₂ both consist of marked and unmarked forms with respect to the relative status between the giver and receiver.

6) Closeness and Status relations between the giver and receiver are determined by the speaker following, to a certain degree, a general principle based on socio-cultural norms. The determination, however, may not conform to a given norm, but may largely be influenced by other psychological factors.

A full semantic interpretation of the verbs of 'giving' with such characteristics as above requires a set of rules which can specify all the relevant contexts of situations in which these verbs occur. Such rules must provide (1) the information about the speaker and other participants including the hearer and audience in the situation of 'giving', (2) the speaker's presuppositions about the participants in 'giving', and (3) a set of the speaker's logical deductions to define the relative closeness and status with other participants. I will characterize these context-accounting rules as pragmatic rules of use.

(Note: The term "pragmatic rules", as used in this paper, means statements about regularities from which linguistic forms follow when they are uttered in a certain discourse.)

Pragmatic considerations in semantics have more or less been regarded as paralinguistic procedures which are marginally applicable to linguistic phenomena. Evidence has been given in the present paper to the contrary. Pragmatic rules of use can be linguistically justifiable in as much as they can capture linguistic insight by revealing underlying linguistic relatedness between superficially diverse semantic forms such as the English passive of the 'give' verb and Japanese Give₂. Without consideration of the pragmatic aspect of the 'giving' constructions, such underlying phenomena may not have been generalized.

-T16-

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-T17-

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