Phrasal Restrictions on Noncontrastive Topic: The Case of Japanese

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Prelim 1 Defense
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**Japanese wa**
- Marker for topic constituents
- Able to attach to a variety of phrase types
- All types permit a contrastive reading
- Noncontrastive reading most common with subjects and ‘scene-setting’ adjuncts (Heycock 2008:57)

**Noncontrastive wa**: categorically prohibited from attaching to certain phrase types, or merely dispreferred?
- NP, PP, CP not prohibited, regardless of thematic relation (even if pragmatically disfavored)
- VP, AP prohibited, since these constituents do not denote entities
Topic Constituents vs. Discourse Topics

What do we mean by ‘topic’? Roberts (2010) helps us out:

**Topic Constituent**

Syntactic notion: topic by virtue of structural position, occupies TopP within CP domain (Rizzi 1997, Kishimoto 2009).

(Japanese *wa*)

**Discourse Topic**

Pragmatic notion: ‘theme’ of theme/rheme dichotomy, the ‘old information’ anaphoric to a question under discussion (QUD).

(1) a. (Where did James eat lunch?)
    b. [James]_{Topic} ate lunch [at a café on State St.]_{Rheme}
Since Kuno (1973), *wa* is typically dichotomized as follows:

**Thematic (Noncontrastive) *wa***

(2) Minegishi-sensei-wa kono daigaku-no kyooju da.
   Minegishi-HON-TOP this university-GEN professor COP
   ‘Dr. Minegishi is a professor at this university.’

(3) Ano hon-wa Yamada-san-ga kinoo katta.
   that book-TOP Yamada-HON-NOM yesterday bought
   ‘That book, Ms. Yamada bought yesterday.’

**Contrastive *wa***

(4) Watashi-ga ringo-wa taberu ga, banana-wa tabenai.
   I-NOM apple-TOP eat but banana-TOP eat.NEG
   ‘I eat apples, but not bananas.’
Kuroda (1972, 2005, inter alia): \textit{wa} as a Marker of Categorical Judgment

The effect of \textit{wa} is a matter of felicity, not truth conditions.

(5) a. Inu-ga neko-o oikakete-iru.
   dog-NOM cat-ACC chase-be
   ‘A/The dog is chasing a cat.’

b. Inu-wa neko-o oikakete-iru.
   dog-TOP cat-ACC chase-be
   ‘A/The dog is chasing a cat.’

(Kuroda 1972:161, example 8)

- **Sentence with \textit{wa}-phrase**: \textbf{categorical judgment}
  - makes an assertion about a prominent constituent
    (the \textit{wa}-marked constituent)
- **Sentence without \textit{wa}-phrase**: \textbf{thetic judgment}
  - simply affirms an eventuality – the eventuality is prominent
Identifying Noncontrastive *wa*-phrases (1)

- Which *wa*-phrase types permit noncontrastive readings?
- Examine by category as well as by thematic relation (already saw AGENT and THEME NPs)
- Need only find examples where *wa* is clearly in noncontrastive reading
  - sentence-initial examples
  - sentences without negation
  - where possible, use Reinhart’s (1981) test: ‘Tell me about *x*’ creates context for *x* to become noncontrastive topic

(6)  

\[ x\text{-ni-}tsuite\ \text{oshiete\ kudasai}. \]
\[ x\text{-about}\ \text{tell}\ \text{IMP.POL} \]

‘Tell me about *x*.’

NB: The set of thematic relations chosen is not essential for the claims at hand.
Identifying Noncontrastive *wa*-phrases (2)

**TIME NPs as noncontrastive *wa*-phrases:**

(7)  
(a)  ‘Tell me about today.’
(b) Kyoo-wa Pari-de fushigi-na jiken-ga okita.
    today-TOP Paris-LOC strange incident-NOM occurred
    ‘Today, a strange incident occurred in Paris.’

(8)  
(a)  ‘Tell me about the 26th of this month.’
(b) Kongetsu-26-nichi-wa senmonka-ni-yoru genchi-choosa-ga okonawareru.
    this.month-26-day-TOP expert-by field-investigation-NOM be.conducted
    ‘On the 26th of this month, a field investigation led by experts
    will be conducted.’
Identifying Noncontrastive *wa*-phrases (3)

LOCATION PPs as noncontrastive *wa*-phrases (*de* marks location of event, *ni* marks location of state):

(9) a. (‘Tell me about Sapporo.’)
   b. Sapporo-de-wa yuki-matsuri-ga 5-ka-ni kaimaku-shita. Sapporo-LOC-TOP snow-festival-NOM 5-day-on opened ‘In Sapporo, the Snow Festival began on the 5th.’

(10) a. (‘Tell me about Nara Park.’)
    b. Nara-kooen-(ni)-wa shika-ga takusan iru. Nara-park-LOC-TOP deer-NOM many be ‘At Nara Park, there are many deer.’

(11) a. (‘Tell me about Mr. Kuwata.’)
    b. Kuwata-san-(ni)-wa musume-ga futari iru. Kuwata-HON-LOC-TOP daughter-NOM two.CL be ‘Mr. Kuwata has two daughters.’
EXPERIENCER, passivized AGENT, and RECIPIENT PPs as noncontrastive *wa*-phrases:

(12) a. (‘What do you think?’)
   b. Watashi-(ni)-wa anata-no kimochi-ga yoku wakaru.  
      ‘I know just how you feel.’

(13) a. (‘Tell me more about Yuri.’)
   b. Yuri-chan-ni-wa sakki tondemonai koto-o iwareta.  
      ‘By Yuri, I was told an outrageous thing earlier.’

(14) a. (‘It’s almost Mamoru’s birthday.’)
      ‘That’s right. To Mamoru, let’s give a big present this year.’
GOAL and SOURCE PPs as noncontrastive *wa*-phrases:

(15)  
   a. (‘Tell me about San Francisco.’)  
   b. San-Furanshisuko-e/ni-wa hobo mainen shucchoo-de San-Francisco-to-TOP almost every.year business.trip-by itte-iru. 
      be.going  
      ‘To San Francisco, I go almost every year on business.’

(16)  
   a. (‘Tell me about Minatomirai.’)  
   b. Minatomirai-made-wa densha-de itta hoo-ga ii. Minatomirai-unti-TOP train-by went be.better  
      ‘As far as Minatomirai, you should go by train.’

(17)  
   a. (‘Tell me more about Keio University’s Mita campus.’)  
   b. Mita-kyanpasu-kara-wa Tookyoo-Tawaa-ga mieru. Mita-campus-from-TOP Tokyo-Tower-NOM be.visible  
      ‘From Mita campus, you can see Tokyo Tower.’
COMITATIVE and INSTRUMENT PPs as noncontrastive wa-phrases:

(18)  a. (‘Tell me about your girlfriend.’)
b. Kanojo-to-wa daigaku-no koro-ni shiriatta.
    girlfriend-with-TOP college-GEN time-in got.to.know
    ‘My girlfriend, I got to know in college.’

(19)  a. (‘Tell me about the Internet.’)
b. Intaanetto-de-wa kaigai-ni iru tomodachi-to-mo raku-ni
    Internet-by-TOP overseas-LOC be friend-with-even easily
    renraku-ga toriaeru.
    contact-NOM can.take
    ‘By means of the Internet, you can easily keep in touch even
    with friends who are overseas.’
Identifying Noncontrastive wa-phrases (7)

CPs as noncontrastive wa-phrases:

(20)  a.  (‘Did you know she was born in Korea?’)
       b.  Ano yuumeijin-ga Kankoku-de umareta-koto-wa yoku
            that celebrity-NOM Korea-LOC was.born-COMP-TOP well
            shirarete-iru.
            be.known
            ‘That that celebrity was born in Korea is well known.’

(21)  a.  (‘Tell me more about you guys.’)
       b.  Bokura-ga deatta-no-wa 2-nen-mae-no koto da.
            we-NOM met-COMP-TOP 2-year-before-GEN thing COP
            ‘It was two years ago that we met.’

(22)  a.  (‘Which one should I choose?’)
       b.  Dochira-o erabu-ka-wa anata-shidai da.
            which-ACC choose-Q-TOP you-dependent COP
            ‘Which to choose is up to you.’
However, VP and AP *wa*-phrases cannot be noncontrastive:

(23) a. (‘Have you thought more about the proposal?’)
    b. Kangaete-*wa* iru. (Demo kimete-*wa* inai.)
       think-TOP be (but decide-TOP be.NEG)
       ‘I’ve thought about it. (But I haven’t decided.)’

(24) a. (‘Is the assignment difficult?’)
    b. Muzukashiku-*wa* aru. (Demo muri-de-*wa* nai.)
       difficult-TOP be (but impossible-TOP be.NEG)
       ‘It is difficult. (But it isn’t impossible.)’
Results should not be surprising!

- Follows common view of ‘topics as entities’ shared by dynamic / information-structural accounts such as Portner and Yabushita (1998, 2001)
- Noncontrastive reading available for a wa-phrase just when the wa-marked constituent denotes an entity of some kind (event argument included)
- Lends itself to the following neo-Davidsonian analysis (Davidson 1967, Kratzer 1996):

(25)  
\begin{align*}
a. \quad & \text{‘In Sapporo, the Snow Festival began on the 5th.’} \\
& (\lambda P. \exists e. P(e) \land \text{LOCATION}(e, \text{sapporo})) \\
& (\lambda e. \text{began}(e) \land \text{TIME}(e, 5th) \land \text{PATIENT}(e, \text{snow\_festival}))
\end{align*}
Preservation of Truth Conditions

Sentences with and without noncontrastive *wa* are semantically identical at their topmost level:

\[
\exists e. \text{began}(e) \land \text{TIME}(e, 5) \land \text{PATIENT}(e, \text{snow}_\text{-festival}) \land \text{LOCATION}(e, \text{sapporo})
\]

This is consistent with (and a formalization of) the claim that these sentences are truth-conditionally equivalent.
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Noncontrastive topics in Japanese restricted to entity-denoting constituents

- VP, AP noncontrastive wa-phrases: ungrammatical, marked constituent not an entity
- NP, PP, CP noncontrastive wa-phrases: grammatical in general

Avenues for future research:

- Provide thorough pragmatic analysis and isolate factors influencing felicity of noncontrastive topic phrase types
- Incorporate data from other languages with various systems of topic-marking
References (1)


