

# Phrasal Restrictions on Noncontrastive Topic: The Case of Japanese

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# Introduction

- 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]<sub>Topic</sub> ate lunch [at a café on State St.]<sub>Rheme</sub>

# Japanese *wa*: Thematic vs. Contrastive

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): *wa* as a Marker of Categorical Judgment

The effect of *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 *wa*-phrase: **categorical judgment**
  - makes an assertion about a prominent constituent (the *wa*-marked constituent)
- Sentence without *wa*-phrase: **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*-ni-tsuite oshiete kudasai.  
*x*-about tell 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  
 this.month-26-day-TOP expert-by  
 genchi-choosa-ga okonawareru.  
 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.'



## Identifying Noncontrastive *wa*-phrases (4)

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 wakarū.  
 I-DAT-TOP you-GEN feeling-NOM well understand  
 'I know just how you feel.'
- (13) a. ('Tell me more about Yuri.')  
 b. Yuri-chan-ni-wa sakki tondemonai koto-o iwareta.  
 Yuri-HON-by-TOP earlier outrageous thing-ACC was.said  
 'By Yuri, I was told an outrageous thing earlier.'
- (14) a. ('It's almost Mamoru's birthday.')  
 b. Soo da. Mamoru-ni-wa kotoshi ooki-na purezento-o  
 so COP Mamoru-DAT-TOP this.year big present-ACC  
 ageyoo.  
 let's.give  
 'That's right. To Mamoru, let's give a big present this year.'

## Identifying Noncontrastive *wa*-phrases (5)

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-until-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.'

## Identifying Noncontrastive *wa*-phrases (6)

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.'

## Identifying Noncontrastive *wa*-phrases (8)

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.)'

# Topics as Entities

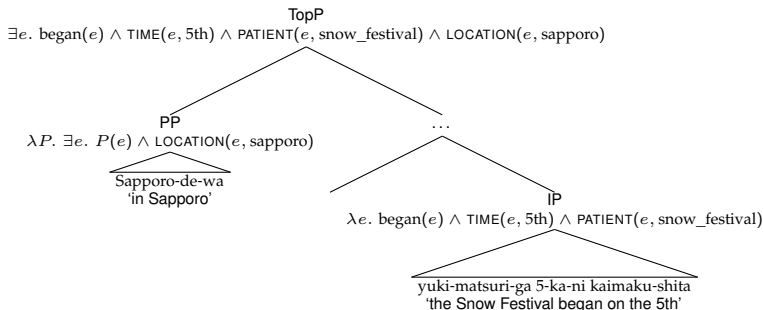
Results should not be surprising!

- 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) a. ‘In Sapporo, the Snow Festival began on the 5th.’  
 b.  $(\lambda P. \exists e. P(e) \wedge \text{LOCATION}(e, \text{sapporo}))$   
 $(\lambda e. \text{began}(e) \wedge \text{TIME}(e, \text{5th}) \wedge \text{PATIENT}(e, \text{snow\_festival}))$

# Preservation of Truth Conditions

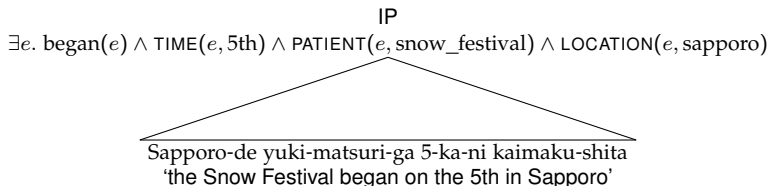
Sentences with and without noncontrastive *wa* are semantically identical at their topmost level:



This is consistent with (and a formalization of) the claim that these sentences are truth-conditionally equivalent.

# Preservation of Truth Conditions

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# Conclusion

- 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

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