

Thematic Relations in Japanese

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0. Introduction

The analysis of some syntactic phenomena from the view point of functional sentence perspective has received much recent attention (e.g. Dik 1978, 1981, Murata 1982, Werth 1984, Halliday 1985, Fukuchi 1985, Kuno 1987). In my paper (1987), assuming that there is structure, called "Thematic Structure"¹, structure consisting of a theme and a rheme within a clause, and that English is subject to the well-known "From-old-To-New Principle"², I have showed that Pattern (1) is the most normal and coherent in English from the functional point of view.

(1)

Theme	Rheme
Given	New

This paper presents an analysis of thematic relations in Japanese within the framework of functional grammar. This analysis arrives at generalizations that Pattern (1) is also the most normal and coherent in Japanese as well and, in deed, it is one of the universal aspects of language.

1. Thematic and contrastive particle *wa*: *Toritate*

Unlike English, in Japanese, thematized elements (i.e. topics) are realized explicitly with a syntactic marker, the particle *wa*³.

(2) Them \rightarrow $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{NP} \\ \text{pp} \end{array} \right\} + wa$ (cf. Inoue, 1978: 94)

(3) a. John *wa* kinoo gakkoo o yasunda.
yesterday school absent

'Speaking of John, he was absent from school yesterday.'

b. Mary *wa* hayaku neta.
early went to bed

'Speaking of Mary, she went to bed early.'

Besides the thematic usage of *wa*, the particle *wa* is also used to express contrastive meaning.

(4) a. John *wa* sono hito to hanasita ga Mary *wa* hanasanakatta.
 the man with talked but talked not
 'John talked with the man, but Mary didn't.'

b. Kaze *wa* madatuyoi desu ga ame *wa* moo hutte imasen.
 wind still strong is but rain yet falling is not
 'The wind is still strong, but it is not raining yet.'

As claimed by Kitahara (1981: 263), the thematic and contrastive usage of *wa* is essentially of the same nature: the function of *wa* is toritate ('extraction' or 'promotion'). He states that the following italicized parts are semantically promoted as themes or contrasting elements.

(5) a. *Taroo wa* Hanako ni bunpoo o osieta.
 to grammar taught

'Speaking of Taroo, he taught Hanako grammar.'

b. *Hanako ni wa* Taroo ga bunpoo o osieta.
 'Speaking of Hanako, Taroo taught her grammar.'

c. *Bunpoo wa* Taroo ga Hanako ni osieta.
 '(Not physics, but) bunpoo Taroo taught Hanako.'

d. *Hanako ni bunpoo o osieta no wa* Taroo da.
 'It is Taroo who taught Hanako bunpoo.'

e. *Taroo ga Hanako ni osieta no wa* bunpoo da.

In (5d) and (5e), the italicized parts correspond to the *wh*-parts of an English cleft sentence. This particle I will call toritate *wa*.

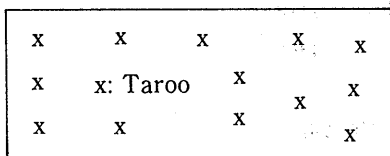
(6) Toritate particle *wa*:

a. thematic

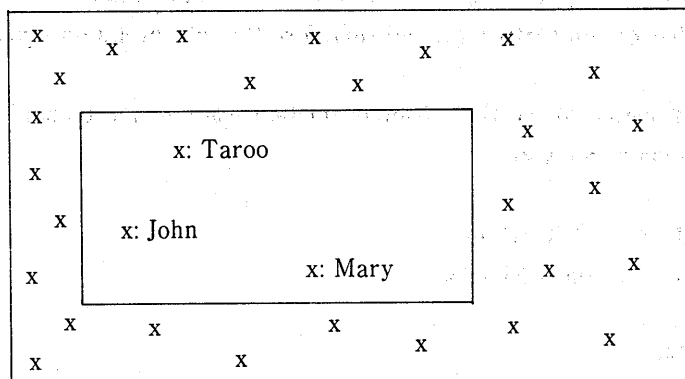
b. contrastive

There are two kinds of toritate. In the first case, the extraction of one element from an open set including indefinite elements: so to speak, 'absolute' toritate. In the second case, the extraction of one element from a closed set with definite elements: 'relative' toritate. The difference between these two kinds of toritate is illustrated in (7).

(7) a. absolute toritate



b. relative toritate



For example, (8) and (9) are ambiguous in toritate.

(8) Taroo *wa* Hanako ni bunpoo o osieta.

grammar taught

a. 'Speaking of Taroo, he taught Hanako bunpoo.'

b. '(Not John nor Mary, but) Taroo taught Hanako bunpoo.'

(Kitahara, 1981: 263)

(9) Watakushi ga sitte iru hito *wa* party ni kimasen desita.

I knowbeing people to come not did

a. 'Speaking of the persons whom I know, they did not come to the party.'

b. '(People came to the party, but) there was none whom I knew.'

(Kuno, 1973: 48)

In (8) *Taroo wa* is ambiguous: (8) becomes absolute toritate when given the following context.

(10) Q : Taroo wa Hanako ni nani o sita ka ?

what did

A : Taroo wa Hanako ni bunpoo o osieta.

Wa in (10) can be regarded as thematic *wa*, and therefore the interpretation given in (8a) results. Thus (8), in this interpretation, is a statement about Taroo, whom the speaker knows and extracts from his registry of indefinite people, and it proposes that Taroo taught Hanako bunpoo.

On the other hand, *Taroo wa* in (8) becomes relative toritate in the next context.

(11) Mary to John to Taroo wa Hanako ni atta.

and and met

'Mary, John, and Taroo met Hanako.'

John to Mary wa nanimo osienakatta ga,

and anything taught not but

Taroo wa Hanako ni bunpoo o osieta.

'John and Mary did not teach anything, but Taroo taught Hanako bunpoo.'

Wa in (11) can be regarded as contrastive *wa*, and therefore the interpretation given in (8b) results.

It follows from the observation above that absolute toritate leads to the thematic *wa* and relative toritate to the contrastive *wa*.

(12) Toritate.

a. absolute toritate — thematic *wa*

b. relative toritate — contrastive *wa*

2. *wa*: not a subject marker

As we have observed in the previous section, *wa* is used to make NP's or PP's themes or contrasts. In this section I will argue that particle *wa* is not concerned with the case relations in a sentence. In short, *wa* is different from other particles such as *ga* (subject marker) or *de* (locative marker) in that *wa* has nothing to do with case assignment. *Wa* does not affect the case relations in a clause.

In particular, some people are apt to regard the *wa* in the next examples as a subject marker almost like a real subject marker *ga*.

(13) Tikyuu wa marui.

earth round

'Speaking of the earth, it is round.'

(14) Hito wa sinu.

man mortal

'Speaking of man, he is mortal.'

(15) Ni kakeru san wa roku desu.

2 timed 3 6 is

'Speaking of 2 timed 3, it makes 6.'

(Oono, 1978: 26)

Although the *wa* looks like a subject marker, this is not really the case here. *Wa* looks like a subject marker only because the *ga* has been deleted next to it. (Many other case markers do not delete next to *wa*.) Observe the following examples.

- (16) Kono nezumi *wa* neko *wa* kuwanai.
 this mouse cat eat not
 a. 'This mouse does not eat cats.'
 b. 'Cats do not eat this mouse.'
- (17) Taroo *wa* Hanako *wa* yuushoku ni shootaisita.
 Taroo Hanako dinner for invite did
 a. 'Taroo invited Hanako for dinner.'
 b. 'Hanako invited Taroo for dinner.'

Oono (1978: 27) states that example (16) is ambiguous as shown in (16a) and (16b). In (16a), *kono nezumi wa* is regarded as a subjective case, while in (16b) it is regarded as an objective case. This observation is correct, which leads us to the following conclusion:

- (18) The toritate *wa* does not affect case relations. It has nothing to do with case assignments. In fact, it obscures case relations in some situations.

3. *Wa* and given information

In this section, I will claim that the particle *wa* is related to given information. Especially the thematic particle *wa* is always related to given information. On the other hand, the subjective case marker *ga* is always regarded as new information.

- (19) NP + *wa*: given information
 ga: new information

First of all, I will argue that the thematic particle *wa* always means given information. In Japanese, thematized elements usually occur in the initial thematic position of the sentence, accompanied with the particle *wa*.

- (20) John *wa* gakusei desu.
 student is.
 'Speaking of John, he is a student.' (Kuno, 1973: 38)
- (21) Katoo san *wa* konchoo hayaku sippatu simasita.
 this morning early leave did
 'Speaking of Mr. Kato, he left early this morning.'
- (22) Kimi no kuruma *wa*, kakarichoo ga seibi sita hazudesu.
 you 's car chief clerk fix did suppose
 'Speaking of your car, the chief clerk was supposed to fix it.'
- (23) Kono heya ni *wa* shokumotuo oka nai de kudasai.
 this room in food leave not please
 'Speaking of this room, please do not leave food in it.'
- (Inoue, 1979: 25)

Syntactically speaking, this phenomena can be explained by an optional transformation

called *Thematization*, which is stated in (24):

(24) Thematization (optional)

Add *wa* to an NP + particle, and prepose the NP + particle + *wa* to the beginning of the sentence.

(Kuno, 1973: 71)

Some original particles such as *ga* or *o* get deleted when followed by *wa*. The thematization rule (24) changes (25) to (26).

(25) Keisatu *ga* mamonaku Bill no zuusho o mitukeru kamosirenai.

police before long 's address find out might

'The police might find out Bill's address before long.'

(26) Bill no zuusho *wa*, keisatu *ga* mamonaku mitukeru kamosirenai.

'Bill's address, the police might find out before long.'

(Inoue, 1978: 75)

For more syntactic arguments about Thematization, see Inoue (1978: Chapter 2, 73–109).

In Japanese, there is a clear distinction between the thematic particle *wa* and the subjective case marker *ga* in terms of information. The particle *wa* carries given information and *ga* does new information. This distinction explains the following examples.

(27) Dare { **wa* } iru ka. 'who is there ?'
 who { *ga* } is ?

(28) Nani { **wa* } arimasu ka. 'what is there ?'
 what { *ga* } there ?

(29) Dore { **wa* } kimi no desuka. 'Which is yours ?'
 which { *ga* } your 's is ?

In the examples above, interrogative pronouns require the particle *ga*, but not *wa* because those interrogatives are new information to the hearer.

4. *Wa* and conditions on thematized elements

This section will deal with the behavior of the particle *wa* and *ga* taking into account the viewpoint of thematic relations in Japanese and I will show that NP's with *wa* cannot become thematic elements of sentences unless they are given information to the hearer. Kuno (1972) has analyzed some aspects of the Japanese particles *wa* and *ga*. They are summarized in the following way:

(30) *wa*

Wa marks either the themes or the contrasted element of the sentence. The theme must be either anaphoric (i.e., previously mentioned) or generic, while there is no such constraint for the contrasted element.

(31) *ga*

Ga as subject case marker is either for *neutral description* or for *exhaustive listing*. When the predicate represents a state (but not existence) or a habitual-generic ac-

tion, only the exhaustive-listing interpretation is obtained. (Kuno, 1972: 270)

The statements made by Kuno correctly reflect the behavior of the particle *wa* and *ga*. Thematized elements with *wa* must be either anaphoric or generic. Observe the following examples:

(32) Generic
Kuzira wa honyuu-doobutu desu.
 whale mammal is
 'Speaking of whales, they are mammals. A whale is a mammal.'

(33) Anaphoric
John wa watakushi no tomodati desu.
 I 's friend is
 'Speaking of John, he is my friend.'

(34) Anaphoric (or endophoric or exophoric, but not *Non-reference)
Hutari wa party ni kimasita.
 two people to come did
 'Speaking of the two persons, they came to the party.'

(Kuno, 1973: 44)

Kuno (1973: 45) states that example (34) is grammatical only when *hutari* is taken as meaning 'the two people (under discussion)', and that this example would be ungrammatical if it meant 'the people who came to the party numbered two', that is, if *hutari* was taken as two people with no anaphoric reference. It follows from his statement that the thematized NP *hutari* has to be given information for (34) in order to be grammatical. If the thematized NP *hutari* did not have any anaphoric reference, then it would have to be new information to the hearer. And the whole sentence would be less acceptable. Consequently, (34) may be considered to be ambiguous in specificity. Example (34) is grammatical if *hutari* is looked upon as specific and non-generic, which satisfies the condition on thematized elements (= topics): thematized elements must be given information. Then example (34) can keep the most coherent information structure, the one indicated in (1):

(1)

Them	Rheme	
Given	New	

On the other hand, if *hutari* is regarded as nonspecific and non-generic, then example (34) becomes ungrammatical, since *hutari* has to be new information. Hence *hutari* violates the condition on thematized elements. It goes without saying that *hutari* preceded by a determiner like *sono* 'the' is even more obviously unambiguous.

(35) *Sono* hutari wa party ni kimasita.

the two people to come did

'Speaking of the two people, they came to the party.'

A whole sentence becomes ungrammatical if it contains a thematized element which is non-anaphoric and non-generic. Observe now the following examples where the thematized elements are non-anaphoric and non-generic.

(36) Non-anaphoric and non-generic

a. **Oozei no hito* wa party ni kimasita.

many 's people to came

'Speaking of many people, they came to the party.'

b. **Omosiroi hito* wa party ni kimasita.

'Speaking of interesting people, they came to the party.'

c. **Dareka* wa byooki desu.

somebody sick is

'Speaking of somebody, he is sick.'

(Kuno, *ibid.*: 45)

From the facts observed above, we can say that the thematized elements of Japanese sentences, as in English sentences, must be either generic or anaphoric. The thematized elements (NP or PP + *wa*) in the initial thematic position always must be given information in Japanese. In other words, what is not the Given to the hearer, namely, the New, cannot appear in the thematic position with *wa*. In fact, in the thematic expression, NP or PP + *wa*, the NP or PP must be given information even if it is not in sentence initial position.

Therefore, as in English, non-specific and non-generic NP's like *dareka* ('somebody') or *oozei no hito* ('many people': quantified NP's), which are not given information, cannot cooccur with the particle *wa*. Hence all the examples in (36) are ungrammatical.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined the behavior of syntactic phenomena of Japanese sentences including the particles *wa* and *ga*, and I have analyzed thematic relations in Japanese from the functional sentence perspective, which examines sentences in discourse from the viewpoints of "theme and rheme," "given and new," "topic and comment," and so on. What's more, employing these devices, I have demonstrated the usefulness of the functional sentence perspective for analyzing "syntactic" phenomena. I have also shown that Pattern (1) is the most unmarked and coherent in Japanese as well, and in fact it is considered to be one of the universal aspects of language.

NOTES

1. Halliday (1970) defined the thematic structure as follows:

Theme is the initial component of a sentence, the rheme being the remainder.

2. According to the definitions by Halliday and Hasan (1976: 326), in speaker-hearer terms, given and new information is described in the following way:

a. Given information

Given information expresses what the speaker is presenting as information that is recoverable to the hearer from some source or other in the environment — the situation, or the preceding text:

b. New information

New information expresses what the speaker is presenting as information that is not recoverable to the hearer from other sources.

Moreover, the From-Old-To-New Principle is described by Kuno (1987: 302) as in:

This principle states that in languages in which word order in sentences is relatively free, the unmarked word order of constituents is "old, predictable information first, and new, unpredictable information last."

3. Among particles such as direct-object marker *o*, indirect-object marker *ni*, locative marker *de*, *ni*, directional marker *e*, *kara*, possessive marker *no*, some are deleted when followed by the thematic particle *wa*.

$$(i) \text{ NP } + \left\{ \begin{array}{l} ga \\ o \\ \vdots \end{array} \right\} + wa \longrightarrow \text{ NP } + wa$$

For example,

(ii) a. John *wa* party ni itta.
to went

'John went to the party.'

b. *John *ga wa* party ni itta.

c. John *wa* party ni itta.

(iii) a. Mary *ga* sono hon *o* yonda.
the book read did

'Mary read the book.'

b. *Sono hon *o wa* Mary *ga* yonda.

c. Sono hon *wa* mary *ga* yonda.

4. Thus, if the whole sentence consists of new information only, there can be no thematized elements in that clause.

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