

## Japanese particle *Wa* and other particles: A multiplicity

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ABSTRACT. As Akira Mikami states in his book (*Bunpô shôronshû* 1979), “the heart of making meaning” in Japanese lies in the ability effectively to wield its postpositions. This paper examines the characteristics and varied, context-dependent meanings of the Japanese postpositional particle *wa* (topic marker) in relation to other particles in Japanese. The particle *wa* generally is regarded as a topic or thematic marker that relates to a known or contrastive connotation, or to some other referent. The Japanese morpheme *wa* is used as a marker denoting or connoting the immediately preceding expression as a marker of focus, contrastive and/or shared information. Proper use of the particle *wa* is quite challenging for many students of Japanese as a foreign language.<sup>1</sup> It is challenging for a beginning Japanese language teacher to clearly and effectively explain when and how to use the particle *wa* correctly. This is because it often is used where another particle remains a grammatically correct choice, while *wa*, nonetheless, remains the “better” choice and the one that would be used naturally by any native speaker. When content and desired nuance are considered, “effective communication” calls for *wa*'s proper employment. Such particle-dependent semantic choices do not have a ready correlate in English. Though imprecise, perhaps an analogy may be made to a native English speaker's strategic use of ‘a’ vs. ‘the’ in cases such as:

- (1) I still have an old book on Japanese linguistics.
- (2) I still have the old book on Japanese linguistics.

At one's first encounter, usage of *wa* does not appear to be very complicated. The simplest case is when the topic marker *wa* simply replaces the subject marker *ga* (the

nominative case-marker). The second relatively simple case is when *wa* replaces the accusative marker *wo*. Challenges begin to arise when attempting to deconstruct the different uses of *wa* in relation to other particles since it often entails psychological aspects of the speaker including minute nuances and emotions of his or her perceived or actual mental state. It connotes the speaker's attitude.

*Keywords:* topicalization, topic marker, particle *wa*, focus, case-marker, Japanese postposition, Akira Mikami.

The following abbreviations and symbols are used as needed throughout the remainder of this paper:

ACC	=	accusative (direct object marker)
ADJ	=	adjective; adjectival; adjectival predicate
ADV	=	adverb
COMP	=	complimentizer
CONJ	=	conjunctive
COP	=	copula
GEN	=	genitive case marker
LOC	=	locative
NEG	=	negation
NOM	=	nominative
NP	=	noun phrase
PAST	=	past tense
PLN	=	plain
POL	=	polite form
PP	=	postpositional particle
PRED	=	predicate. A part of a clause that indicates what is said about the subject.
QM	=	question marker
S	=	sentence
STAT	=	stative
TE	=	<i>te</i> -form
TEMP	=	temporal
TOP	=	topic marker

**1. INTRODUCTION.** Academic discourse regarding ‘the subject’ (*shugo*) and ‘the topic’ (*daimokugo*) in relation to the Japanese postpositional particle *wa* has been conducted for almost a century. It still is a hot topic because the relationship(s) between ‘the topic’ and other particles in Japanese is yet to be fully understood, defined and agreed upon. Questions surrounding the particle *wa* have become more clearly defined since the Japanese language started to be learned more commonly as a foreign language after World War II. Scholarly pursuit of these questions also has been encouraged by the growth of sociolinguistics as an independent academic discipline over the last 50 years. The concept of ‘the topic marker’ has been debated by many scholars in Japan and abroad. Until recently, consensus surrounding the particle *wa* was largely relegated to its role as ‘the topic marker’ or the contrastive marker and the elucidation of its function in these two roles.<sup>2</sup> Here, concentration on the characteristics of *wa* in relation to other particles within the same sentence or clause will offer readers a deeper understanding of the nature of *wa* than commonly is provided to non-native speakers. *Wa* is perhaps best understood first as a morphemic vehicle, the function of which is more significant in its paralinguistic richness than its superficially syntactic function may suggest. *Wa* may contain within it an anxious pregnant pause, an eye roll, or the staccato intonation of a Valley Girl's OMG. Thus, the very notion of defining *wa* is misguided.

**1.1. TOWARD A GRAMMATICAL DEFINITION OF PARTICLE WA (は).** Japanese particles can be divided into case markers and postpositions.<sup>3</sup> Japanese uses the morphological device *wa* (written は in Hiragana script), often referred to in the Western literature, as the topic marker. Here is a brief, if reductionist, grammatical definition of the particle *wa* before we proceed with the discussion. TOPICALIZATION in linguistics refers to a grammatical usage that establishes a part of a sentence

as the topic of the sentence by means of morphology, grammar, or speech sound. Topicalization is a phenomenon we can observe in many languages throughout the world. Sentences exhibiting such characteristics are called ‘topicalized’ sentences. By highlighting a topic within the commonly acceptable position or form in the sentence, the topicalized expression followed by *wa* often moves to the sentence-initial position (or left-dislocation). It is not unusual to topicalize more than one constituent element.<sup>4</sup>

The topic is understood to be information ‘shared’ (*kichi-jôhô* in Japanese) between the speaker and listener(s). There is a pragmatic principle in any language that known (assumed) information is placed on the left and the new on the right. In general, the topic is placed at the beginning of a sentence. In some languages, topicalization is achieved by way of speech sound (i.e. intonation). For example, sound variation such as weakening the pronunciation of the topic can be used to indicate topicalization. This approach is said to make it more difficult for listeners to determine what is being topicalized.

A well-regarded Japanese dictionary, *Kadokawa kokugo chûjiten* (Kadokawa 1979), defines the particle *wa*.<sup>5</sup> A summary of the definition is as follows. The particle *wa* is placed next to a nominal, a declinable (conjugated) word, an adverb, an auxiliary verb, and other particles except the case markers *ga* or *wo*. It limits and defines the topic of a sentence.

Understanding of Japanese postposition *wa* is very important insofar as it appears more frequently than other words except the genitive marker *no*. It also has important functions in connecting words and phrases in Japanese sentences. Japanese postpositional particles establish the relationship among the words in a sentence. Many Japanese sentences are composed with one or more postpositional phrases and a verb phrase. The *wa* is extremely intricate. Thus, coming to a robust understanding of *wa* is one of the most stubborn but essential challenges for learners of

Japanese as a second language. For native speakers of Japanese, proper usage of postpositional particle *wa* is intuitive. Native Japanese speakers do not consciously ‘choose’ one as they may with other words or expressions. To the Japanese ear, there is indeed a ‘right’ answer when it comes to *wa*.

In Japanese, a noun and noun phrases generally are followed by particles. Aside from functioning as a topic marker, the particle *wa* also functions to highlight some type of a contrast. *Wa*'s contrastive connotation also distinguishes it from *ga*, in cases where their grammatical function is otherwise indistinguishable.

A typical sentence in Japanese has topic-predicate relationship that starts with X[nominal] *wa* followed by a predicate. As mentioned earlier, in general, an expression is said to be ‘topicalized’ when a sentence/clause is marked by *wa* and is brought to the sentence initial position. The following sentences are typical examples of this structure.

## 2. CO-APPEARANCE OF TOPIC MARKER AND SUBJECT MARKER

(2.1) Nihon wa yama ga ooi desu.

Nihon-TOP yama-NOM plentiful COP

*‘There are many mountains in Japan.’ Lit. ‘As for Japan, mountains are plentiful.’*

(2.2) Kono mise wa yasai ga yasui desu.

this store-TOP vegetable-NOM cheap COP

*‘As for this store, vegetables are cheap.’*

In the above sentence 2.2.2, the expression *kono mise* is the topic of the sentence. The particle *wa* is a bound morpheme that is attached to various speech parts. *Wa* is one of the postpositional particles that once were used for reading *kanbun* (sentences written in classical Chinese) with Japanese grammar. That is why the particle *wa* is written ば, but it is always pronounced as [wa]. Traditionally, the notion is explained to non-native speakers of Japanese as something equivalent to the meaning of an English sentence in which the sentence's subject is highlighted by way of preceding it with a modifier such as 'as for', 'with regard to', or 'regarding'. Japanese particles are roughly equivalent in function to English prepositions except that Japanese particles are placed after the word/phrase to be attached. *Wa* does not have an English equivalent as a grammatical element, although, in some cases, there is some functional similarity to the English article 'the' placed before a noun (or noun phrase). Unlike 'the', however, *wa* can be attached to more than just nominal expressions.<sup>6</sup> When used in this capacity, *wa* almost always is used for the contrastive connotation it provides.

Language students' natural tendency is to seek the native language L1 correlates when attempting to acquire new concepts and structures in the second language L2. The *wa* often entails some abstract relationship in the 'universe' of the topicalized word, and other expression(s) in the sentence, or with some idea of the speaker. It leaves room for the listener's imagination and interpretation of the sentence.

*Wa* is used with other postpositions, and it is necessary to know when we may safely delete other particles when followed by *wa*.<sup>7</sup> As you will see, the subject marker, *ga*, and the object marker *wo* (that is, the nominative and accusative case marker respectively) are not used together with *wa*, and these markers (*ga* and *wo*) are omitted when the subject or object is topicalized by *wa*.<sup>8</sup>

**3. PREVIOUS RESEARCH.** Among the numerous scholarly works that deal with Japanese linguistics, the most seminal work on Japanese particles was written in Japanese: *Zô wa hana ga nagai* by Akira Mikami (Kuroshio 1980). In the preface of this book, Mikami writes:

Among the grammatical devices of the Japanese language, the most important is ‘*te-ni-wo-ha*’. Among those four, *ha* (pronounced as [wa]) is the most important. . . . Being the substituting agent (*daikô*) is one of the central concepts. The *wa* substitutes for *ga*, *no*, *ni*, *wo*.

The following topicalization is offered as an example by Mikami (1980).

*Zô wa hana ga nagai.*  
 elephant-TOP trunk-NOM long-PRED  
 ‘*Elephants have long trunks.*’  
 [Regarding elephants, their trunks are long.]

This seemingly simple sentence highlights the semantic importance of the effective teaching and learning of the proper topic marker usage for L2 learners. Mikami introduces the notion of *daikô* ‘agent’ as a tool for clarifying the semantic import of *wa* topicalization. *Daikô* is the notion that there are ideas or information that are shared between the speaker and the hearer(s). While Mikami and many others have made significant contributions to our understanding of *wa*, there remains much more to explore, to understand and develop effective teaching strategies.

Another distinguished scholar, Susumu Kuno, described the issue surrounding *wa* in detail. Kuno (1973) offers the following example:

Bunmeikoku ga                      dansei ga      heikin              zyumyô ga      mijikai.  
 civilized countries-NOM      male-NOM      on average      life-span-NOM      short

*'It is [in] civilized countries that men's average life-span is short.'*<sup>9</sup>

This example is intended to sit in contrast to:

Bunmeikoku **wa**                      dansei ga      heikin      zyumyô ga              mijikai.  
 civilized countries-TOP      male-NOM      average life-span-NOM      short

*'As far as civilized countries (are concerned), men's average life-spans are short.'*

It is extremely helpful to read S.-Y. Kuroda's *Japanese Syntax and Semantics: Collected Papers*.

It explains, in great detail, commonly accepted terms of grammar such as subject, object, and predicate. For teachers of Japanese, what Kuroda says in this work is very important in understanding Japanese postpositions.

**4. A BRIEF EXPLANATION OF TOPICALIZATION.** Topicalization itself is not unique to Japanese. It is a characteristic shared by many languages. It is most frequently done by bringing the topicalized sentence element to the sentence-initial position. In English, as well, topicalization is used for emphasis. Emphasis can be placed on the topic or focus of a sentence by placing an expression at the beginning part of the sentence. In Japanese, however, topicalization is less straightforward. You will see that, in Japanese, topicalization can occur without movement to the sentence-initial position although this placement can and often does occur. Furthermore, *wa* may be dropped entirely when the topicalized expression is semantically obvious as the topic in informal

discourse. The example a of each pair below is a non-topicalized sentence; and the second b example is topicalized.

(a) I like Sushi. I don't like Sashimi.

(b) Sushi, I like (it). Sashimi, I don't.

(a) My car is still running nicely.

(b) Still running nicely, my car is.

Here is an example from Mikami (1979:15):

Watashi no    ie e wa            kuru hito ga            nai.  
 I-GEN            house to-TOP   come person-NOM   not exist-PRED

*'There is nobody who is coming to my house.'*

The effect of the particle *wa* in the above sentence can be thought of as having a ripple effect. That is, here, use of the postpositional *wa* has two consequences: (1) It topicalizes the sentence object (*i.e.*, 'house'), and (2) it, in turn, deemphasizes the importance of the directional particle *e* 'to', allowing particle *e* to be deleted without sacrificing the basic meaning of the sentence. Let's once again consider Mikami's example analogized to English:

Watashi no ie wa kuru hito ga nai.

(a) Preceding Interrogative: Whom have you seen?

(b) My house: there's nobody who comes.

Topicalization is context-dependent. The topicalized expression must be the focus or the already-understood in a discourse and is assumed to be some shared idea or information (through past experience).

The following is an example of the characteristics. The Japanese language is a head-final language in its syntax.<sup>10</sup> And, when a Japanese sentence has particles, the word order is relatively free before the verb phrase as in the sentence below.

- (2) (a) Koko kara **wa** Tôkyô made hikôki de nanji-kan kakari-mas-u ka.<sup>11</sup>  
 this place from-TOP Tokyo to airplane by how many hours take-POL QM  
*'From here, how many hours does it take to (get to) Tokyo by airplane?'*

Here, *kara* is a case marker that describes where something is or whence it starts.<sup>12</sup>

- (b) Tôkyô made **wa** koko kara hikôki de nanjikan kakarimasu ka.  
 Tokyo to-TOP this place fromairplane by how many hours take-POL QM
- (c) Hikôki de **wa** koko kara Tôkyô made nanjikan kakarimasu ka.  
 airplane by-TOP this place from Tokyo to how many hours take-POL QM
- (d) Nanjikan koko kara Tôkyô made hikôki de kakari-mas-u ka.  
 how many hours this place from Tokyo to airplane by take-POL QM

An adverbial phrase *nanjikan* ‘how many hours’ expressing duration can be placed anywhere before the final verb phrase, but an interrogative expression or phrase [*nan(i)* ‘what’ + time] cannot be topicalized as in 2d.

It appears that a *wa*-topicalized phrase can be treated as a quasi-adverbial in that the topicalized phrases, generally speaking, can take various places before the predicate. The sentences above essentially have the same *basic* meaning, however, their distinctive word order allows different connotations to be communicated. In general, speakers determine word order in accordance with what sentence element they want to emphasize vs. deemphasize. That is, on what the speakers themselves may be focusing on and/or on what they, in turn, intend the listener to focus.

**5. PARTICLE *ni* AND TOPICALIZATION.** Topicalization has practical communicative functions insofar as it is used in fixed expressions such as *konnichi-wa* ‘Good afternoon!’, *konban-wa* ‘Good evening!’, and the like. In general, however, Japanese topicalized sentences employ the sentence-initial position (or clause-initial position) at the beginning of a sentence. In the following example 5.1, there are no case markers before the topic marker *wa*.

- (5.1) Ohiru **wa**      dō                      shimasu      ka.  
          lunch-TOP    what                      do-POL      QM  
                          ‘What are you going to about lunch?’

One of *wa*’s characteristic functions is to link the topic to the rest of the sentence. The following sentence 5.2 is not as common as 5.1 above since the circumstances in which the particle *ni* is

used are rather limited. The topic marker *wa* may be used [after particle *ni* ‘to/at’] when one’s intended focus for the listener (and his/her response) has something to do with the lunch or the lunch time (vis-à-vis the lunch [i.e. meal] in and of itself).

- (5.2) Ohiru ni **wa** do shi-masu ka.  
 lunch at-TOP how/what do-POL QM  
 ‘What are you going to do at/for lunch?’

An adverbial phrase *ohiru ni* ‘at/for lunch’ can be topicalized as in 5.2, but the connotation of the topicalized phrase *ohiru ni wa* is not clear without further context. If this *ni* phrase is interpreted as a temporal expression, *ni* can be optionally deleted (and generally is for the sake of brevity). Thus, *wa* topicalization of adverbial phrases contributes to the context-dependence (for meaning) and introduces the opportunity for possible deletion of other particles, depending on the communicative intention (intended focus emphasis) of the speaker without compromising basic meaning. In other sentences, dropping particle *ni* may lead to unintended and (usually) undesired semantic ambiguity.

- (5.3) Ashita ni **wa** repôto ga deki-masu.  
 tomorrow by-TOP report-NOM be done-POL  
 ‘The report will be done by tomorrow.’

In 5.3, temporal particle *ni* can not be replaced by the topic marker *wa* because the meaning of the particular temporal concept of ‘on/by time X’ is the focus here. Here again, the word order

becomes freer when the particles are present. Observe the following 5.4 and 5.5:

- (5.4) Repôto ga ashita ni **wa** deki-masu.  
 report-NOM tomorrow-TOP be done-POL  
*‘As for the report, by tomorrow, it will be done.’*

Here, so-called “double topicalization” is possible, as in the following example:<sup>13</sup>

- (5.5) Repôto **wa** ashita ni **wa** deki-masu.  
 report-TOP tomorrow within -TOP be done-POL  
*‘As for the report [is concerned], by tomorrow, it will be done.’*

In 5.5 above, two topic markers are used. In a sentence such as this, both topicalized phrases may become contrastive, and they compare with some other ideas.

**6. WA REPLACING THE SUBJECT MARKER GA.** The subject marker *ga* can be replaced with *wa*:

- (6.1) Kore **wa** hon desu.<sup>14</sup>  
 this-TOP book COP-POL  
*‘This is a book.’*

As in 6.1 above, *wa* may come after a nominal expression. The topic *kore* ‘this’ is a concept shared between the speaker and the hearer. The demonstrative *kore* with particle *ga* in 6.2 below is the subject, and *kore* is referring to new information.

- (6.2)    *Kore ga            hon    desu.*  
           this-NOM    book   COP-POL  
           ‘*This is the book [and not referring to another thing].*’

What comes between *ga* and *desu* here describes what *kore* ‘this’ is. With *ga*, it can imply the exclusion of other things in the sentence. When a sentence has an adjective or nominal predicate, the subject often is topicalized with *wa* as mentioned by Shigeyuki Suzuki's *Nihongo bunpô keitairon* (1972).<sup>15</sup> In Japanese, an adjective can become the predicate of a sentence by itself.

- (6.3)    *Chūgoku wa    ookii.*  
           China-TOP    big  
           ‘*China is big.*’

When the adjective is used as a predicate, such as *ookii* in above 6.3, it appears in the conclusive form such as *chiisai* ‘small’ or *chiisakatta* ‘was small’ in the past or non-past tense. An adjective as a predicate must be placed at the end of a clause although the conclusive form of the adjective may be followed by copula *desu* or a sentence-ending particle such as an interjection *yo* [for emphasis] or *na(a)* [for emotion].<sup>16</sup>

7. NP + WA + ADJECTIVAL PREDICATE. The copula *desu* often is affixed to the preceding adjectival predicate in a polite or formal discourse in today's Japanese.<sup>17</sup> The sentence final adjective may be followed by *-des-* for politeness, as seen in 7.1 below.

- (7.1) Kono kuruma **wa** chiisai desu.  
 this car-TOP small-PRED COP-POL  
*'This car is small.'*

In 7.2 below, see the plain past tense of the adjective placed before the copula *desu*:

- (7.2) Ano kutsu **wa** takakat-ta desu.<sup>18</sup>  
 those shoes-TOP expensive-PAST COP-POL  
*'Those shoes were expensive.'*

A Japanese *i*-adjective can modify nouns as with other languages, but also can function as a predicate without a copula. The pronoun *kare* 'he' followed by *ga* generally is regarded as 'focus':

- (7.3) Kare **wa** se ga takai desu.  
 he-TOP height-NOM tall-COP-POL  
*'He is tall.'*

The above sentence is equivalent to the often-quoted sentence in Mikami's *Zô wa hana ga nagai*.

The adjectival sentence similar to 7.2 is 7.4. The *desu* is optionally placed for politeness.

- (7.4) Kyô **wa**           suzushii desu.  
 today-TOP   cool    COP-POL  
*'It is cool today.'*

In a context such as in folktales, a sentence with a verbal predicate at the opening of a story generally will take particle *ga* since something new is going to be introduced:

- (7.5) Mukashi mukashi,   ojii-san to obaa-san *ga*  
 once upon a time    old man and old woman-NOM  
 chiisana mura ni    sunde i-mashi-ta.<sup>19</sup>  
 small village at-PP live being-POL-PAST  
*'There were an old man and an old woman living in a small village.'*

In the above sentence, you will see the use of the subject marker *ga* since the subject *ojii-san to obaa-san* 'an old man and an old woman' is new information in the story to be told.

- (7.6) Obâ-san *ga*           kawa de           sentaku wo           shiteiru to,  
 old women-NOM   a river at-LOC   washing-ACC       do being when-PP  
 kawakami kara    ookina momo *ga*    nagarete ki-mashi-ta.  
 upstream from    big peach-NOM    flowing-CONJ come-PAST

*‘When the old woman was washing the laundry at a river, a big peach came floating from upstream.’*

In most sentences like 7.6 above, the subject of a dependent clause generally is not topicalized with *wa*. The subject *ookina momo* ‘big peach’ in the main clause is newly introduced information. Therefore, particle *ga* is used for the subject of the main clause as well. A conditional conjunction *to* ‘while’ is used to combine two clauses. Here, the predicate with the conjunction *to* preceding the main clause must be in the non-past form. The eventuality manifested in the main clause is treated as a natural consequence of the adverbial dependent clause.

The locative *de* in 7.6 is the action locative particle that appears with action verbs, and the *de* cannot be replaced by locative *ni* used for stative verbs. This distinction is sometimes confusing to English-speaking learners of Japanese because the equivalent for both *de* and *ni* are associated with the English locative preposition ‘in’ in the cross-linguistic interpretation. This action-locative *de* refers to the place at which some action/activity takes place. This *de* here is topicalized for a contrastive purpose. The following is another example of the action locative postposition *de*:

(7.7) Mizuumi no soba de            e wo            kakimasu.  
           lake-GEN    vicinity-LOC    picture-ACC    draw-POL  
           *‘I paint a picture near a lake.’*

**8. SUBJECT MARKER *GA* AND TOPICALIZATION IN AN ADJECTIVAL SENTENCE.** Here is a second look at the adjectival predicate in other relevant sentences. In an adjectival sentence, the subject

describing nature or natural phenomena generally will take the NOM marker *ga* although *wa* is generally used when the speaker connotes certain contrast.

- (8.1) Kaze ga tsuyoi (desu).  
 wind-NOM strong (COP-POL)  
*'The wind is strong.'*

- (8.2) Tsuki ga kirei da.  
 moon-NOM prettiness-NOM COP  
*'The moon is pretty.'*

Here 8.2, since *kirei* is an adjectival noun (a loan word from Chinese), a copula is required to be grammatical. The following sentence 8.3 is not topicalized since the speaker wants simply to express what the 'water' (*mizu*) is like.

- (8.3) Mizu ga tsumetai (desu).  
 water-NOM cold-ADJ (COP)  
*'The water is cold.'*

- (8.4) Kyô wa kaze ga tsuyoi (desu).  
 today-TOP wind-NOM strong (COP)  
*'The wind is strong today.'*

As in 8.4 above, if the subject *kaze* ‘wind’ becomes topicalized, the sense of contrast for *kaze* becomes overt.

When the subjects of the sentences such as 8.5 below are modified by a demonstrative adjective such as *kono* ‘this’ or [nominal]+*no* like 8.6, the subject marker often is replaced by *wa*:

- (8.5) Kono kawa no mizu **wa** tsumetai (desu).  
 this river-GEN water-TOP cold (COP)  
 ‘*This river's water is cold.*’

- (8.6) Natsu no yoru **wa** nagai (desu).  
 summer's night-TOP long (COP-POL)  
 ‘*Summer's night is long.*’

**9. TOPICALIZED EXPRESSION WITH REGULAR VERBS.** The distinction between *ga* and *wa* also is used with a regular verb predicate as in the following:

- (9.1) Tanaka-san *ga* kesa ki-mashi-ta.  
 Tanaka-san-NOM this morning come-POL-PAST  
 ‘*Mr. Tanaka came this morning.*’

In 9.1 above, the subject (the noun that precedes *ga*) can be topicalized as in 9.2 below.

- (9.2) Tanaka-san **wa** kesa ki-mashi-ta.  
 Tanaka-san-TOP this morning come-POL-PAST  
 ‘As for Mr. Tanaka, (he) came this morning.’

The *wa* here gives a nuance of contrastive sense although the nuance may not be easily perceived by an L2 learner of Japanese. A double topicalization such as 9.3 can be used.

- (9.3) Kesa **wa** Tanaka-san **wa** ki-mashi-ta.  
 this morning-TOP Tanaka-san-TOP come-POL-PAST  
 ‘This morning Tanaka-san came!’

**10. PARTICLE *wa* PLACED BEFORE AN INTERROGATIVE EXPRESSION.** In the pattern {NP *wa* INTERROGATIVE *desu ka*} such as 10.1 below, the copula *desu* cannot be replaced by the copula *da* as a main clause (or sentence).

- (10.1) Kore **wa** nan desu ka.  
 this-TOP what COP QM  
 ‘What is this?’ (Lit. As for this, what is [it]?)<sup>20</sup>

But, in an embedded clause, the use of the copula *da* is grammatical such as in the following sentence:

- (10.2) Ano hito **wa** nani-jin da ka shiri-mas-en.  
 that person-TOP what nationality-COP QM know-POL-NEG  
*'I don't know that person's nationality is.'*

In 10.2 above, the embedded sentence has the same word order. The word order does not change even if the question (interrogative sentence) contains interrogative pronouns such as *dare* 'who', *nan/nani* 'what', *doko* 'what place', *itsu* 'what time', *donata* 'who' [honorific], etc. When an interrogative appears after the topic [initial] position in the adjective or nominal predicate sentence, the subject generally will take *wa* as in 10.3.

- (10.3) Koko **wa** doko desu ka.  
 this place-TOP what place COP QM  
*'What place is this?'*

Sentences such as 10.4 below do not take *ga*. They are treated as {X *wa* Y *desu*} pattern.

- (10.4) Ano hito **wa** dare desu ka.  
 that person-TOP who COP-POL QM  
*'Who is that person?'*

But, as in 10.5 below, the use of copula *da* in an embedded sentence is grammatical. Note here that  $\sim ka$  *shirimasen* 'do not know [if]' can be preceded by a clause or a nominal.

- (10.5) Ano hito wa dare da ka shiri-mas-en.  
 that person-TOP who COP QM know-POL-NEG  
 ‘I don't know who that person is?’

The particle after *ano hito* can be *ga* (non-topicalized) instead of *wa*.

- (10.6) (Are wa) nan desu ka.  
 (that-TOP) what COP QM  
 ‘What is that?’

- (10.7) (Sore wa) itsu desu ka.  
 (It-TOP) when COP QM  
 ‘When is it?’

As in 10.8 below, we may have an interrogative adverbial in the predicate after particle *wa*. The object of the verb *shimasu* is topicalized.

- (10.8) Kore wa dô shi-masu ka.  
 this-TOP how do-POL QM  
 ‘What will you do with this?’



- (11.4) Sakura no                    hana **wa**                    kirei                    desu.  
 Cherry blossom-GEN flower-TOP    prettiness-NOM                    COP-POL  
 ‘Cherry blossoms are pretty.’

The expression *shûmatsu* ‘weekend’ in 11.5 below is a temporal adverbial and topicalized. The particle *wa* in the phrase *shuumatsu wa* is highlighting the time and/or contrasting with other days, and the directional particle *e* gives an overt sense of directionality.

- (11.5) Shûmatsu **wa** doko e                    iki-mashi-ta                    ka.  
 weekend-TOP    what place-LOC                    go-POL-PAST    QM  
 ‘Where did you go on the weekend?’

**12. CONCLUSION.** *Wa* can indicate both topic and contrast. In most cases, when a certain focus in a sentence is placed before the predicate, the particle *ga* is used. On the other hand, when the center of the focus is placed in the predicate, *wa* is used. *Wa* directs one’s attention to what follows, such as *Kyô wa ikimasen* (‘Today, I am not going!’). It is used to elicit a contrast to an expected or anticipated idea, such as *Ashita wa dô suru no?* (‘What are you going to do, tomorrow?’) When an interrogative expression (such as *doko*, *nani*, and *itsu*) is in the predicate, the subject will take *wa*.

This study demonstrates that whenever a word, phrase, or clause is topicalized, the expression becomes a quasi-adverbial expression. Therefore, as with Japanese adverbs, if a word or a phrase is topicalized in a clause or a sentence, the topicalized expression is relatively free to

be placed anywhere before the predicate. There still is a certain hierarchy in ordering the position since the meaning ultimately dictates the word order as well. There is a great deal more to learn about how particle *wa* works with other postpositions that are not addressed in this paper. The relationships with other postpositions in a sentence should be further investigated.

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## DICTIONARY

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<sup>1</sup> The exception is the native speakers of Korean since there is significant grammatical similarity even in use of particles. This is my experience in learning elementary Korean in Korea.

<sup>2</sup> The general understanding about Japanese topicalization is that the topic marker marks both or either topics and contrasts. The particle *wa* makes both contrastive topic and non-contrastive topic. The contrastive *wa* carries a tone distinction, and it can be optionally brought to the sentence- or clause-initial position. Kuno (1973) explains that the non-contrastive topic needs to be brought to the sentence-initial position.

<sup>3</sup> There is a clear contrast between case markers and postpositions in Japanese. Japanese native speakers know through L1 Japanese language acquisition that postpositions can be immediately followed by *wa/mo*, but case markers cannot take those postpositions. The case markers includes nominative *ga* (subject marker) and accusative *wo* (object marker). The postpositions include *e* ‘to’, *de* ‘in’, *ni* ‘at’, *to* ‘with’, *kara* ‘from’, *made* ‘through, till’, and *ori* ‘than’.

<sup>4</sup> A Japanese topic marker does not represent any grammatical case such as subject or object.

<sup>5</sup> p. 1649.

<sup>6</sup> As mentioned above, what precedes particle *wa* may be a noun, an adverb, or a form of verb, a verb phrase, etc.

<sup>7</sup> The dropping of *wa* (i.e., topic marker deletion) is common in casual conversation in Japanese. Ex. *Tanaka-san, mō iki-mashi-ta yo.* (“Mr. Tanaka went already.”)

<sup>8</sup> The accusative case-marker is presented as /*wo*/ in Romanization rather than simply /*o*/ to emphasize its pronunciation and distinction from the non-particle Japanese vowel お /*o*/.

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- <sup>9</sup> Kuno Susumu (1933-) is Professor Emeritus of Linguistics at Harvard University. As mentioned by other researchers, Japanese phrases are exclusive head-final, and sentences are exclusively left-branching.
- <sup>10</sup> The term ‘head-final’, here, refers to a language in which sentence predicates are located at the end of a sentence.
- <sup>11</sup> The politeness marker POL *-mas-* is infixed in the verb phrase.
- <sup>12</sup> Particle *kara* is also used for temporal starting point (ex. *Kaigi wa san-ji kara hajimarimasu*. ‘The conference starts from 3 o’clock.’) or reason and cause (*Sake wa kome kara dekimasu*. ‘Sake is made from’).
- <sup>13</sup> Japanese double topicalization refers to the highlighting and/or contrasting two elements by topic marker *wa* before the predicate.
- <sup>14</sup> The word *desu* is a copula like English copula *be* and is used to predicate sentences.
- <sup>15</sup> Suzuki, Shigeyuki. *Nihongo bunpô keitairon* (Mugi Shobô 1972:236).
- <sup>16</sup> A copula is a word used to link the subject of a sentence with the predicate, such as *desu* ‘be’ in the sentence *Kore wa hon desu* ‘This is a book’. The word copula derives from the Latin for ‘link’ that connects two different things.
- <sup>17</sup> In a very formal conversation and communication, the expression *degozaimasu* or *dearimasu* is used for the copula in place of *desu*.
- <sup>18</sup> The *-des-* in *takakatta desu* is a polite speech marker. The speaker is being polite to the listener by adding *-desu*.
- <sup>19</sup> The *-ta* in *-mas(h) i-ta* is the past tense maker in colloquial speech.
- <sup>20</sup> Note that an interrogative sentence in English grammar places the interrogative [noun or adverb] at the sentence-initial position although it may be preceded by an adverb.

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<sup>21</sup> A referent refers to a specific idea or entity in the world that a word or phrase identifies or denotes.

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