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## RESEARCH REPORT

### When (not) to use the Japanese particle *wa*: Groundhood, contrastive topics, and grammatical functions

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In Japanese linguistics and elsewhere, the particle *wa* in its thematic use has been widely regarded as a paradigmatic instance of a ‘topic marker’. This work aims to demonstrate that, contrary to this received wisdom, most often thematic *wa* merely indicates the groundhood (the status as a nonfocus) rather than the topichood (the status as a topic) of the marked constituent, although it serves as a marker of contrastive topic in some configurations. In a root clause, as a rule, an explicit argument must be marked by thematic *wa* if it (i) is nonfocal and (ii) does not cooccur with an explicit, nonfocal sister argument less oblique than it. This implies that an explicit, nonfocal subject must be *wa*-marked, given that a subject is by definition the least oblique argument. Arguments marked by thematic *wa* despite not meeting this condition (e.g. a *wa*-marked object cooccurring with a *wa*-marked subject), as well as at least some instances of *wa*-marked adjuncts, are interpreted as contrastive topics. It is further pointed out, based on corpus data, that it is much more common for *wa* to indicate mere groundhood than topichood.\*

*Keywords:* information structure, the Japanese particle *wa*, topic, focus, grammatical functions, argument hierarchy

**1. INTRODUCTION.** It has been widely—though not unanimously—held that the Japanese particle *wa* in its so-called thematic use is a topic marker (Tomioka 2016 and references therein). This work aims (i) to demonstrate that, contrary to this received wisdom (and in line with Martin 1975, Fiengo & McClure 2002, etc.), most often thematic *wa* merely indicates the groundhood (the status as a nonfocus) rather than the topichood (the status as a topic) of the marked constituent, although it serves as a marker of contrastive topic in Buring’s (2003) sense in some configurations, and (ii) to account for the conditions under which a ground (nonfocus) item can and must be marked by thematic *wa*.

Section 2 clarifies what I take to be ‘thematic *wa*’: those instances of *wa* occurring on ground items are to be referred to as thematic, and those occurring on focus items are to be referred to as contrastive. (The notion of contrast, however, will play a role in the licensing conditions of thematic *wa*.)

Section 3 discusses problems with the view that thematic *wa* always marks a topic. On the one hand, thematic *wa* cannot be taken to always mark a contrastive topic, as it is easy to find cases where *wa* occurs on a constituent that clearly does not count as a contrastive topic. The idea that *wa* indicates some other, less clearly understood sort of topic, on the other hand, is subject to the problem of circularity and nonfalsifiability.

Sections 4 and 5 develop an account of thematic *wa* based solely on relatively well-understood notions: (i) focushood/groundhood, (ii) contrastive topics, and (iii) the hierarchy of grammatical functions. In a root clause, as a rule, an explicit argument must be marked by thematic *wa* if it (i) is nonfocal and (ii) does not cooccur with an explicit,

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nonfocal sister argument less oblique than it. This implies that an explicit, nonfocal subject must be *wa*-marked, given that a subject is by definition the least oblique argument. *Wa*-marking of this sort (where *wa* serves as a ground marker) is exempted when the nonfocal argument occurs in the domain of postfocal reduction, which is a phonological means of indicating groundhood. Thematic *wa* also serves as a marker of contrastive-topichood (the status of a constituent as a contrastive topic). Arguments marked by thematic *wa* despite not meeting the aforementioned condition (e.g. a *wa*-marked object cooccurring with a *wa*-marked subject) and at least some instances of *wa*-marked adjuncts are interpreted as contrastive topics.

Section 6 reports the results of a simple corpus survey, which reveal that most frequently *wa* is licensed by virtue of the host constituent being a nonfocus rather than by its being a contrastive topic; in other words, most often *wa* does not mark a topic.

**2. THEMATIC AND CONTRASTIVE USES OF *wa*.** Since Kuno 1972, 1973a,b, it has been widely recognized that the Japanese particle *wa* has two uses, called the THEMATIC USE and the CONTRASTIVE USE. There has not been a clear consensus, however, as to where to set the boundary between the two and how to determine whether a given instance of *wa* is thematic or contrastive, let alone how the two uses are related (e.g. whether *wa* is polysemous at the lexical level, or whether the two uses are distinct or rather form a continuum).

With Tomioka (2016), I take the view that the primary division is to be made between instances of *wa* occurring on focus items (*wa<sub>F</sub>* for short) and ones occurring on ground (i.e. nonfocus) items (*wa<sub>G</sub>* for short). In line with Lambrecht (1994), Rooth (1995), and Vallduví and Engdahl (1996), among others, I adopt the following assumptions as to the notions of focus and ground: (i) focus is that semantic component of a sentence that is new and informative (from the hearer's perspective), and ground (= nonfocus) is that semantic component of a sentence that is expected and noninformative (from the hearer's perspective); and (ii) a sentence meaning may consist either (a) of some focus and some ground or (b) solely of focus, but cannot consist solely of ground ('all-focus' utterances are possible but 'all-ground' ones are not).

Example 1B exemplifies *wa<sub>G</sub>*, and 2B exemplifies *wa<sub>F</sub>*.<sup>1</sup>

- (1) A: Hiroki ga Osaka de tabeta no wa nan desu ka?  
       H.    NOM O.    in eat.PST PRO *wa<sub>G</sub>* what COP.PLT.PRS DP  
       'What is it that Hiroki ate in Osaka?'  
       B: Hiroki **wa** Osaka de [sushi]<sub>F</sub> o tabemashita.  
       H.    *wa<sub>G</sub>* O.    in sushi ACC eat.PLT.PST  
       'Hiroki ate sushi in Osaka.'

<sup>1</sup> The abbreviations used in glosses are as follows: ACC: accusative, ARG1.HON: ARG1 honorific (subject honorific), ARG2.HON: ARG2 honorific (object honorific), ATTR: attributive, AUX: auxiliary, BEN: benefactive auxiliary, COMP: complementizer, COP: copula, DAT: dative, D.AUX: discourse auxiliary, DP: discourse particle, EVID.AUX: evidential auxiliary, EVID.P: evidential particle, GEN: genitive, GER: gerund, HON.RT: honorific role term, INF: infinitive, INTJ: interjection, NEG: negation, NEG.AUX: negative auxiliary, NOM: nominative, NPFV: nonperfective auxiliary, PLT: polite, PLT.AUX: politeness auxiliary, POSS.HON: possessor honorific, POT: potential, PRO: pronoun, PROV: provisional, PRS: present, PST: past.



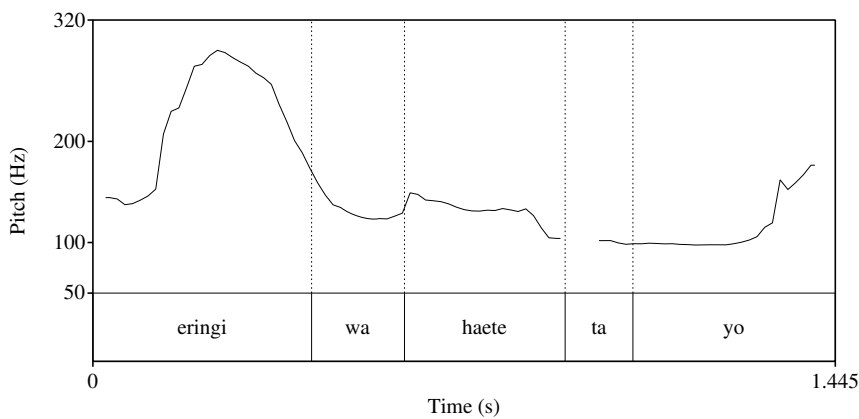


FIGURE 2. Part of a production of 3C.

Furthermore, the *wa*-phrase in 3C may optionally be accompanied by a prominence-lending rise (Oshima 2006)—a tonal rise that takes place toward the end of a focused constituent—while the one in 3B cannot.

The traditional thematic/contrastive division has often been based on the intuited sense of ‘contrastiveness’ or the lack thereof. Some scholars thus may treat the *wa*-phrase in 3B as contrastive, its referent being contrasted with something else. I find it most straightforward to apply the label ‘contrastive *wa*’ exclusively to *wa<sub>F</sub>*, and do so henceforth; this implies that the instance of *wa* in 3B is NOT contrastive *wa*. (It is argued in §5, however, that the notion of contrast—more specifically, that of contrastive topic—plays a role in the licensing conditions of *wa<sub>G</sub>*.)

Examples 4 and 5 are cited to provide further illustration of the potential discrepancy between the terms ‘thematic/contrastive *wa*’ and the focushood-based dichotomy of *wa<sub>G</sub>* and *wa<sub>F</sub>*.

- (4) Ame **wa** futte imasu ga, yuki **wa** futte  
 rain *wa<sub>F</sub>* fall.GER NPFV.PLT.PRS but snow *wa<sub>G</sub>* fall.GER  
 imasen.  
 NPFV.PLT.NEG.PRS  
 ‘It is raining, but it is not snowing.’ (adapted from Kuno 1972:271)
- (5) Ani **wa** niku ga suki da ga, ootoo **wa**  
 elder.brother *wa<sub>G</sub>* meat NOM fond COP.PRS but younger.brother *wa<sub>G</sub>*  
 sakana ga suki da.  
 fish NOM fond COP.PRS  
 ‘The elder brother likes meat, but the younger brother likes fish.’  
 (adapted from Noda 1996:200)

Kuno (1972) considers both instances of *wa* in 4 to be contrastive; the explained tonal criteria, however, indicate that the second instance here is *wa<sub>G</sub>* (i.e. thematic *wa*, under the adopted terminology). Noda (1996) characterizes the two instances of *wa* in 5 as ‘playing a dual role’, being thematic and contrastive at the same time. I treat them as *wa<sub>G</sub>* (i.e. thematic *wa*), again based on tonal criteria.

This work focuses on *wa<sub>G</sub>* and does not have much to say about *wa<sub>F</sub>*. As in Oshima 2020, I consider the latter (*wa<sub>F</sub>*) to be a focus alternative quantifier that belongs to the same natural class as *mo* ‘also’, *sae* ‘even’, and so forth and that induces the conventional implicature that at least one proposition alternative to the prejacent proposition is

not known (to the speaker) to be true.<sup>2</sup> The issue of how the two uses of *wa* are related is also not addressed (see Oshima 2020:173–74 for some discussion).

**3. THEMATIC *wa* AND TOPICHOOD.** The view that thematic *wa* ( $wa_G$ ) is a topic marker has prevailed in the literature; Heycock (2008) characterizes it as a ‘truism’:

it has become a truism that Japanese has an overt marker for topic (*wa*), a concept that is much appealed to in accounts of not only the pragmatics but also the syntax and semantics of a wide range of languages, in many of which however the evidence for the category ‘topic’ is quite indirect. (Heycock 2008:54)

The notion of topic, however, is notoriously elusive, making it hard to prove or falsify the thesis that *wa* marks a topic.

Büring (2003) develops an empirically well-grounded account of topic, although he refers to the notion he addresses as CONTRASTIVE TOPIC and states that it is not to be equated with topic as a more general and abstract category:

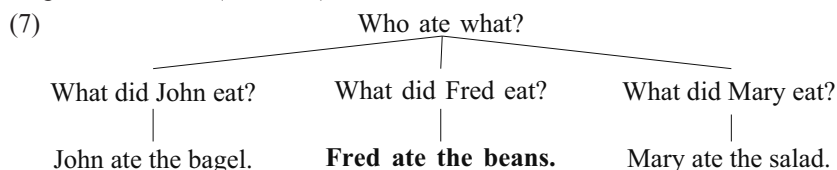
Note that I use the term contrastive topic here to refer to a linguistic category manifested by linguistic means: in English, a fall-rise pitch accent. It is distinct from more abstract notions such as TOPIC (e.g. Reinhart 1982), THEME or (BACK)GROUND, which may but need not be formally marked by intonation or otherwise in a given sentence (see the instructive survey in McNally 1998). I believe, though, that some of the properties attributed to these more abstract categories are in fact properties of contrastive topics in the narrow sense discussed here; hence the choice of term contrastive TOPIC. (Büring 2003:512)

Example 6B exemplifies an English utterance with a contrastive topic (CT), where the contrastive topic is associated with the fall-rise tonal pattern ( $[(L+)H^* L- H\%]$ ) commonly called the (contrastive) topic accent.

(6) A: What about Fred? What did he eat?

B: [Fred]<sub>CT</sub> ate the [beans]<sub>F</sub>.  
 $(L+)H^* L- H\%$                        $H^* L- L\%$                       (adapted from Büring 2003:511)

Büring (2003) proposes, in brief, that a statement with a contrastive topic indicates that the question to which it provides an answer has one or more ‘sister’ questions (i) that are formed by modifying the currently addressed question, substituting the component corresponding to the contrastive topic with some alternative, and (ii) that have been or are yet to be addressed in the same discourse. Example 6B, for instance, presupposes the presence of a ‘d(iscourse-)tree’ that looks like 7.



There have been discussions in the subsequent literature of how this information-structural component may be encoded in other languages, possibly syntactically or morphologically rather than phonologically (e.g. Nguyen 2006 on Vietnamese, Sturgeon 2008 on Czech, Constant 2014 on Mandarin Chinese).

<sup>2</sup> A formulation in more precise terms is given in (i), where  $\llbracket \cdot \rrbracket^o$  and  $\llbracket \cdot \rrbracket^f$  are functions that assign ordinary and focus semantic values (in the sense of Rooth 1995) to an expression, respectively.

(i) The interpretation of  $wa_F(\varphi)$

a. CONVENTIONAL IMPLICATURE: There is a proposition  $p$  such that (i)  $p$  is a member of the contextually salient subset of  $\llbracket \varphi \rrbracket^f$ , (ii)  $p$  is not entailed by  $\llbracket \varphi \rrbracket^o$ , and (iii)  $\neg p$  is compatible with the speaker’s epistemic state.

b. PROFFERED CONTENT (REGULAR ENTAILMENT):  $\llbracket \varphi \rrbracket^o$

The function of  $wa_G$  is clearly different from that of the contrastive topic accent. Observe, for example, that in 8, the use of  $wa_G$  is felicitous—and obligatory—despite there being no contextually relevant alternative questions to the currently addressed one, namely questions about the whereabouts of people other than Yamada.

- (8) A: Nee, Yamada-san iru?  
           hey Y.-HON.RT exist.PRS  
           ‘Hey, is Yamada here?’  
 B: Yamada-san {**wa**/\***ga**} ima shutchoo de Osaka ni itte  
       Y.-HON.RT { $wa_G$ /\*NOM} now business.trip by O.     DAT go.GER  
       masu.  
       NPFV.PLT.PRS  
       ‘Yamada is on a business trip and is in Osaka now.’

If  $wa_G$  is a topic marker but does not mark a contrastive topic, it must mark a different type of topic—an ABOUTNESS TOPIC, to tentatively adopt the term used in some previous works, including Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl 2007 and Miyagawa 2017.<sup>3</sup> To my knowledge, however, no reliable criterion has been established to identify on objective grounds whether a given constituent counts as an aboutness topic. In my opinion, the received supposition that  $wa_{(G)}$  marks a topic is subject to the problem of circularity and nonfalsifiability, the notion of (aboutness) topic being vaguely understood as ‘what the sentence/utterance is about’ and lacking an independent criterion: the function of  $wa_{(G)}$  is to indicate an aboutness topic, which is the information-structural status of a constituent that is indicated by  $wa_{(G)}$ . I argue that the function of and licensing conditions on  $wa_{(G)}$  can be accounted for without having recourse to the notion of aboutness topic. The key ingredients of my account are: (i) groundhood (nonfocushood), (ii) contrastive topics, and (iii) the hierarchy of grammatical functions.

#### 4. THEMATIC $wa$ AND GROUNDHOOD.

**4.1.  $Wa$ -MARKING ON SUBJECTS.** While  $wa_{(G)}$  has been widely regarded as a topic marker, some scholars, including Martin (1975), Makino (1982), Clancy and Downing (1987), Fiengo and McClure (2002), Fry (2003), and Kuroda (2005), take the view that not all  $wa_{(G)}$ -marked constituents are topics and that the function of  $wa_{(G)}$  has to do with some other notion, such as groundhood, backgroundedness, (discourse-level) cohesion, or categorical judgment, rather than or in addition to topichood.

In Oshima 2009, I argued that, in root clauses, a subject must be marked by  $wa$  if it is a ground item (i.e. if it is not the focus or part thereof); this amounts to saying that, as far as  $wa$  occurring on a subject is concerned, its function is better characterized as a ground marker rather than as a topic marker. This supposition is motivated by a data set like the following.<sup>4</sup>

- (9) [Context: It is common ground that three students, Mari, Aki, and Emi, read the literary works *Yukiguni*, *Kokoro*, and *Rashomon*, respectively (each student read exactly one work, and no two students read the same work).]  
 Q: Mari ga *Yukiguni* o yonda no wa itsu desu ka?  
    M.   NOM Y.           ACC read.PST PRO  $wa_G$  when COP.PLT.PRS DP  
       ‘When is it that Mari read *Yukiguni*?’

<sup>3</sup> An alternative label here is THEMATIC TOPIC (Tomioka 2009).

<sup>4</sup> When  $wa$  occurs on a nominative or accusative argument, the occurrence of the case marker (nominative *ga* or accusative *o*) is suppressed.

- A<sub>a</sub>: Mari {**wa**/#**ga**} *Yukiguni* o [senshuu]<sub>F</sub> yomimashita.  
 M. {*wa*<sub>G</sub>/#NOM} *Y.* ACC last.week read.PLT.PST  
 A<sub>b</sub>: *Yukiguni* o Mari {**wa**/#**ga**} [senshuu]<sub>F</sub> yomimashita.  
*Y.* ACC M. {*wa*<sub>G</sub>/#NOM} last.week read.PLT.PST  
 ‘Mari read *Yukiguni* [last week]<sub>F</sub>.’

Examples 9A<sub>a,b</sub> are admittedly somewhat awkward even with *wa* on the subject, involving repetitions of the full NPs in the question. A more natural option here is to leave out the explicit arguments, as in 10A<sub>a</sub>, or to use a cleft construction without an explicit subject, as in 10A<sub>b</sub>. (A similar remark applies to some other examples to follow.)

(10) [In reply to 9Q:]

- A<sub>a</sub>: [Senshuu]<sub>F</sub> yomimashita.  
 last.week read.PLT.PST  
 ‘(She) read (it) [last week]<sub>F</sub>.’  
 A<sub>b</sub>: [Senshuu]<sub>F</sub> desu.  
 last.week COP.PLT.PRS  
 ‘(It) is [last week]<sub>F</sub>.’

Still, the contrast between the *ga*- and *wa*-versions of 9A<sub>a,b</sub> is clear.

Adding *wa* to the object does not lead to improvement of the acceptability of the *ga*-versions of 9A<sub>a,b</sub>.

(11) [In reply to 9Q:]

- A<sub>a</sub>: #Mari **ga** *Yukiguni* **wa** [senshuu]<sub>F</sub> yomimashita.  
 M. NOM *Y.* *wa*<sub>G</sub> last.week read.PLT.PST  
 A<sub>b</sub>: #*Yukiguni* **wa** Mari **ga** [senshuu]<sub>F</sub> yomimashita.  
*Y.* *wa*<sub>G</sub> M. NOM last.week read.PLT.PST

The patterns illustrated above leave open two interpretations. The first is that (*wa*<sub>G</sub> invariably marks an aboutness topic and) an explicit subject must be an aboutness topic if it is not part of the focus. The second is that (*wa*<sub>G</sub> does not necessarily occur on an aboutness topic and) an explicit subject must be marked with *wa*<sub>G</sub> whenever it is not part of the focus. I find the latter more sensible. The first interpretation amounts to saying that in Japanese an explicit subject cannot be part of what Vallduví (1992) calls a ‘tail’, that is, a component that is part of the ground but is not a topic (tail =<sub>def</sub> ground – topic). From the functional perspective, there appears not to be any rationale for the expressivity of a language to be constrained in such a way. Also, this view appears to have a problem of nonfalsifiability. It is logically possible for the subject NP of 9A<sub>a,b</sub> to be presented (by the speaker) and perceived (by the hearer) as an aboutness topic, but there is no direct empirical evidence for this, apart from the fact that the form *wa*<sub>G</sub> occurs on it. It is possible that we will eventually find such evidence, with a better understanding of the notion of topic from general linguistic and psycholinguistic perspectives. For the time being, however, it seems that an account that does not appeal to the notion of aboutness topic is to be favored, if such is available.

*Wa*<sub>G</sub>-marking on a nonfocus subject (of a root clause) is exempted when the subject linearly follows a focus constituent, as in 12A<sub>a,b</sub> (Kuno 1972:288–89, Oshima 2009: 412–13).

(12) [In reply to 9Q:]

- A<sub>a</sub>: [Senshuu]<sub>F</sub> Mari {**wa**/**ga**} *Yukiguni* o yomimashita.  
 last.week M. {*wa*<sub>G</sub>/NOM} *Y.* ACC read.PLT.PST  
 A<sub>b</sub>: [Senshuu]<sub>F</sub> *Yukiguni* o Mari {**wa**/**ga**} yomimashita.  
 last.week *Y.* ACC M. {*wa*<sub>G</sub>/NOM} read.PLT.PST  
 ‘Mari read *Yukiguni* [last week]<sub>F</sub>.’



In Oshima 2009, it is proposed that the effect of relative word order between the (non-focus) subject and the focus item has to do with postfocal reduction, which, like *wa<sub>G</sub>*-marking, indicates groundhood. The key difference between 9A<sub>a,b</sub> and 12A<sub>a,b</sub> is that the subject NPs of the latter are, and those of the former are not, within the domain of postfocal reduction. This implies that the groundhood of the subject NPs of 12A<sub>a,b</sub> is prosodically coded, while that of the subject NPs of 9A<sub>a,b</sub> is not. The contrast between 9A<sub>a,b</sub> and 12A<sub>a,b</sub> can be accounted for by postulating the following constraint.

- (13) When a subject of a root clause is a ground item, its groundhood must be encoded either by *wa<sub>G</sub>*-marking or by postfocal reduction (or both).

**4.2. *Wa*-MARKING ON OBJECTS.** As can be seen in 9, an object NP does not need to be *wa<sub>G</sub>*-marked even if it is a ground item and is outside the domain of postfocal reduction. Indeed, adding *wa<sub>G</sub>* to the object NP of the *wa*-versions of 9A<sub>a,b</sub>, as in 14A<sub>a,b</sub>, leads to awkwardness. (Examples 14A<sub>a,b</sub> are felicitous in some discourse configurations; see §5.)

- (14) [In reply to 9Q:]

A<sub>a</sub>: ??Mari **wa** *Yukiguni* **wa** [senshuu]<sub>F</sub> yomimashita.  
           M.   *wa<sub>G</sub>* *Y.*           *wa<sub>G</sub>* last.week read.PLT.PST  
 A<sub>b</sub>: ??*Yukiguni* **wa** Mari **wa** [senshuu]<sub>F</sub> yomimashita.  
           *Y.*           *wa<sub>G</sub>* M.   *wa<sub>G</sub>* last.week read.PLT.PST

It is not uncommon, by contrast, for an object to be *wa<sub>G</sub>*-marked; furthermore, sometimes *wa<sub>G</sub>*-marking on an object is obligatory. In 15A<sub>a</sub>, for example, the object must be accompanied by *wa<sub>G</sub>*; in 15A<sub>b</sub>, where the object is within the domain of postfocal reduction, *wa<sub>G</sub>*-marking on the object is optional (and is perhaps somewhat awkward).

- (15) [It is common ground that three students, Mari, Aki, and Emi, each read exactly one of the three literary works *Yukiguni*, *Kokoro*, and *Rashomon*, and that no two students read the same work.]

Q: *Yukiguni* o yonda no wa dare desu ka?  
    *Y.*           ACC read.PST PRO *wa<sub>G</sub>* who COP.PLT.PRS DP  
       ‘Who is it that read *Yukiguni*?’  
 A<sub>a</sub>: *Yukiguni* {**wa**/#**o**} [Mari]<sub>F</sub> ga yomimashita.  
    *Y.*           {*wa<sub>G</sub>*/#ACC} M.   NOM read.PLT.PST  
 A<sub>b</sub>: [Mari]<sub>F</sub> ga *Yukiguni* {**wa**/**o**} yomimashita.  
    M.   NOM *Y.*           {*wa<sub>G</sub>*/ACC} read.PLT.PST  
       ‘[Mari]<sub>F</sub> read *Yukiguni*.’

Additional examples of discourse segments where *wa<sub>G</sub>*-marking on an object is obligatory are shown in 16A and 17.

- (16) Q: Ken ga chiketto o katta no wa doko desu ka?  
       K.   NOM ticket ACC buy.PST PRO *wa<sub>G</sub>* where COP.PLT.PRS DP  
       ‘Where is it that Ken bought (his) ticket?’

A: Chiketto {**wa**/#**o**} [kaijoo]<sub>F</sub> de kaimashita.  
    ticket {*wa<sub>G</sub>*/#ACC} venue at buy.PLT.PST  
       ‘(He) bought (his) ticket at [the venue]<sub>F</sub>.’

- (17) [Context: The speaker admires Kitagawa, his senior colleague. Kitagawa has been suspected of murdering the president of their company.]

Are wa, Kitagawa-san ga yatta n ja nai.  
 that *wa<sub>G</sub>* K.-HON.RT NOM do.PST D.AUX COP.INF NEG.AUX.PRS  
 Kitagawa-san ga yareru hazu wa nai n  
 K.-HON.RT NOM do.POT.PRS reason *wa<sub>G</sub>* exist.not.PRS D.AUX  
 da. Datte, shachoo {**wa**/#**o**}, [boku]<sub>F</sub> ga koroshita  
 COP.PRS because president {*wa<sub>G</sub>*/#ACC} I NOM kill.PST

n        da        mono!

D.AUX COP.PRS DP

‘It’s not Mr. Kitagawa who did it. There’s no way Mr. Kitagawa could do it. [I]<sub>F</sub> killed the president, that’s why!’

(adapted from the short story *Suuji-joo* by Soji Shimada)

The key feature common to 15A<sub>a,b</sub>, 16A, and 17 is that they do not involve a *wa<sub>G</sub>*-marked subject; their subject is either a focus item or is (nonfocal and) left implicit.

I propose that, as a rule, *wa<sub>G</sub>*-marking is applied to at most one complement within a (root) clause and is preferentially applied to a complement higher in the argument hierarchy (or equivalently, to a complement with a lower degree of obliqueness). This idea is formulated in more precise terms in 18.

- (18) THE *wa<sub>G</sub>*-MARKING PRINCIPLE (tentative version): Let  $\alpha$  be an explicit, non-focal complement of a given root clause.
- $\alpha$  must be *wa<sub>G</sub>*-marked if  $\alpha$  is an argument, and no coargument  $\beta$  of  $\alpha$  is such that  $\beta$  is nonfocal, explicit, and less oblique than  $\alpha$ .
  - Wa<sub>G</sub>*-marking, however, is exempted (optionally applied) when this condition holds but  $\alpha$  occurs within the domain of postfocal reduction.

This principle can be understood as a compromise of conflicting functional motivations. For the purpose of information-structure encoding, it would be more straightforward and effective to apply *wa<sub>G</sub>*-marking to all nonfocal arguments (or all nonfocal complements or constituents). This, however, would incur obscurity of the meaning and added complexity of the form; a *wa<sub>G</sub>*-marked accusative object (X *wa*) may be misinterpreted as a subject, and a *wa<sub>G</sub>*-marked dative object (X *ni wa*) is more complex than the *wa*-less version.

The idea that complements—arguments and adjuncts—are ranked on a certain scale, and that this order is of relevance to various grammatical phenomena including binding and relative-clause formation, is well established. With Pollard and Sag (1994), I refer to this scale as the OBLIQUENESS HIERARCHY; I remain agnostic about the exact nature of this scale, which is open to diverse theoretical interpretations. The following relation is assumed to hold among Japanese complements.

- (19) THE OBLIQUENESS HIERARCHY: (nominative or dative) subject < dative object < accusative or nominative object < adjuncts

The assumption that a dative object is less oblique than an accusative object might be found questionable, but there are two grammatical phenomena that can be taken to evidence this. First, when a (nominative) subject, a dative object, and an accusative object cooccur in a clause (headed by a three-place verb), only the first two can be targets of an honorific component of the predicate. Honorific predicates targeting the subject (i.e. the least oblique argument) have been labeled as subject honorifics, *sonkeigo*, or ARG1 honorifics; honorific predicates targeting the (sole or less oblique) object have been labeled as object honorifics, *kenjoogo* (of type I), or ARG2 honorifics (McCready 2019, Oshima 2019, 2021, and references therein). The predicate heading 20 is an instance of the former, and that heading 21a,b is an instance of the latter. Example 21b violates the norms concerning the use of honorifics such that (i) one must not honorify a member of their family or some such group when talking with a nonmember and (ii) one does not usually honorify their younger siblings in the first place.

- (20) Abe-sensei wa    Wataru o    Yoji ni    goshookai sareta.  
 A.-HON.RT *wa<sub>G</sub>* W.    ACC Y.    DAT introduce do.ARG1.HON.PST  
 ‘Dr. Abe (who is honorable) introduced Wataru to Yoji.’

- (21) a. Watashi wa Suzuki-sensei ni otooto o goshookai  
 I wa<sub>G</sub> S.-HON.RT DAT younger.brother ACC introduce  
 mooshiageta.  
 do.ARG2.HON.PST  
 ‘I introduced my younger brother to Dr. Suzuki (who is honorable).’
- b. #Watashi wa otooto ni Suzuki-sensei o goshookai  
 I wa<sub>G</sub> younger.brother DAT S.-HON.RT ACC introduce  
 mooshiageta.  
 do.ARG2.HON.PST  
 ‘I introduced Dr. Suzuki to my younger brother (who is honorable).’

When there is only one object, the sole object can be the target of honorification, even if it is accusative.

- (22) Watashi wa Suzuki-sensei o otetsudai mooshiageta.  
 I wa<sub>G</sub> S.-HON.RT ACC help do.ARG2.HON.PST  
 ‘I helped out Dr. Suzuki (who is honorable).’

Second, when a verb selecting for both a dative object and an accusative object participates in a benefactive construction with the benefactive auxiliary *yaru* or *kureru* (Kuno 1987), it is the referent of the dative object that is interpreted as the beneficiary.

- (23) a. Ikeda-san wa aru ryoorinin ni watashi no haha o  
 I.-HON.RT wa<sub>G</sub> certain cook DAT I GEN mother ACC  
 shookai shite yatta.  
 introduce do.GER BEN.PST  
 ‘Mr. Ikeda introduced my mother to [a certain cook]<sub>i</sub> for his<sub>i</sub> sake.’
- b. Ikeda-san wa watashi no haha ni aru ryoorinin o  
 I.-HON.RT wa<sub>G</sub> I GEN mother DAT certain cook ACC  
 shookai shite kureta.  
 introduce do.GER BEN.PST  
 ‘Mr. Ikeda introduced a certain cook to [my mother]<sub>i</sub> for her<sub>i</sub> sake.’

Again, when there is only one object, it can be assigned the role of a beneficiary even if it is accusative.

- (24) Ikeda-san wa watashi o tetsudatte kureta.  
 I.-HON.RT wa<sub>G</sub> I ACC help BEN.PST  
 ‘Mr. Ikeda helped me out (for my sake).’

In sum, both honorification and benefactivization may affect a dative object but not an accusative object when both are present.

The following examples illustrate that *wa<sub>G</sub>*-marking is preferentially applied to dative rather than accusative objects, in accordance with the hierarchy assumed in 19. (Examples 25 and 26 differ only in terms of the word order of interlocutor A’s question.)

- (25) [It is common ground that Yumi is interlocutor B’s fiancée.]  
 A: Goryooshin ni Yumi-san o shookai  
 both.parents.POSS.HON DAT Y.-HON.RT ACC introduce  
 sareta no wa itsu desu ka?  
 do.ARG1.HON.PST PRO wa<sub>G</sub> when COP.PRS DP  
 ‘When is it that you introduced Yumi to your parents?’
- B<sub>a</sub>: Ryooshin ni wa Yumi o [shigatsu ni]<sub>F</sub> shookai  
 both.parents DAT wa<sub>G</sub> Y. ACC April DAT introduce

shimashita.

do.PLT.PST

‘I introduced Yumi to my parents [in April]<sub>F</sub>.’

B<sub>b</sub>: ??Yumi wa ryooshin ni [shigatsu ni]<sub>F</sub> shookai

Y. wa<sub>G</sub> both.parents DAT April DAT introduce  
shimashita.

do.PLT.PST

‘I introduced Yumi to my parents [in April]<sub>F</sub>.’

(26) [It is common ground that Yumi is interlocutor B’s fiancée.]

A: Yumi-san o goryooshin ni shookai

Y.-HON.RT ACC both.parents.POSS.HON DAT introduce

sareta no wa itsu desu ka?

do.ARG1.HON.PST PRO wa<sub>G</sub> when COP.PRS DP

‘When is it that you introduced Yumi to your parents?’

B<sub>a</sub>: Ryooshin ni wa Yumi o [shigatsu ni]<sub>F</sub> shookai

both.parents DAT wa<sub>G</sub> Y. ACC April DAT introduce

shimashita.

do.PLT.PST

‘I introduced Yumi to my parents [in April]<sub>F</sub>.’

B<sub>b</sub>: ?Yumi wa ryooshin ni [shigatsu ni]<sub>F</sub> shookai

Y. wa<sub>G</sub> both.parents DAT April DAT introduce

shimashita.

do.PLT.PST

‘I introduced Yumi to my parents [in April]<sub>F</sub>.’

It appears that the contrast in acceptability between 25B<sub>a</sub>/26B<sub>a</sub>, on the one hand, and 25B<sub>b</sub>/26B<sub>b</sub>, on the other, is not as striking as that between 9<sub>a,b</sub> with wa<sub>G</sub> and 11<sub>a,b</sub> without it. It is plausible that this is because the difference of obliqueness between dative and accusative objects is small in comparison to that between subjects and objects (i.e. subject << dative object < accusative object), so that ‘reversal’ is relatively tolerable.

As mentioned earlier, in Japanese the groundhood of a constituent is coded tonally as well, by postfocal reduction. There are two plausible motivations for additionally having a lexical marker of groundhood (i.e. wa<sub>G</sub>). First, tonal coding of meaning is arguably more prone to miscomprehension than lexical coding is, so the presence of a lexical marker allows more robust encoding. Second, wa<sub>G</sub>-marking compensates for the limitation of postfocal reduction by being applicable to a constituent in prefocal position. Observe 27a, where the domains of postfocal reduction are indicated by underlining, and 27b, where postfocal reduction does not take place. The information-structural status of their subjects could not be coded (it is unspecified whether they are focus items) if it were not for wa<sub>G</sub>.

(27) a. [<sub>S</sub> **Subj.** Obj. Pred.]

b. [<sub>S</sub> **Subj.** Pred.]

The information-structural status of the subject of 27a can be tonally coded by postposing it after the object, thereby putting it in the domain of postfocal reduction. This, however, is costly in its way; it leads to deviation from the canonical word order, incurring a heavier processing load and higher risk of miscommunication.

**4.3. Wa-MARKING AND THE MULTIPLE SUBJECT CONSTRUCTION.** Japanese has a construction known as the MULTIPLE SUBJECT CONSTRUCTION (MSC), where a constituent other than the regular subject selected for by the predicate is fronted and receives subject-like marking (Kuno 1973a,b, Sugimoto 1986, 1995, Heycock 1993, Tateishi 1994).

Typically, the fronted constituent in an MSC, often called a MAJOR SUBJECT, semantically corresponds to a genitive nominal modifying the regular (or MINOR) subject of, or an adjunct in, the unmarked construction with the same truth-conditional meaning. Example 28b is of the first type, and 29b is of the second.

- (28) a. Zoo no hana {ga/wa} nagai.  
elephant GEN nose {NOM/wa<sub>G</sub>} long.PRS  
‘The nose (trunk) of an elephant is long.’  
b. Zoo {ga/wa} hana ga nagai.  
elephant {NOM/wa<sub>G</sub>} nose NOM long.PRS  
‘The elephant is such that its nose is long.’
- (29) a. Kono kusuri de zutsuu ga sugu naoru.  
this medicine with headache NOM immediately be.cured.PRS  
‘A headache is relieved immediately with this medicine.’  
b. Kono kusuri {ga/wa} zutsuu ga sugu naoru.  
this medicine {NOM/wa<sub>G</sub>} headache NOM immediately be.cured.PRS  
‘This medicine is such that a headache is relieved immediately with it.’

The pragmatic meaning contributed by, and the precise syntactic features of, the MSC are matters beyond the scope of the present work. An issue of direct relevance to the current discussion is how the proposed wa<sub>G</sub>-marking principle may deal with the pattern of wa-marking on the major and minor subjects of MSCs. In 30B and 31B, it is natural to suppose that both major and minor subjects are ground items; in both sentences, the major subject has to be marked with wa<sub>G</sub>, while the minor subject resists wa<sub>G</sub>-marking. (Cases where minor subjects are wa<sub>G</sub>-marked are discussed in §5.1, however.)

- (30) A: Zoo no hana wa nagai desu ka? Soretomo  
elephant GEN nose wa<sub>G</sub> long.PRS PLT.AUX.PRS DP or  
mijkai desu ka?  
short.PRS PLT.AUX.PRS DP  
‘Is the nose of an elephant long? Or is it short?’  
B<sub>a</sub>: Zoo wa hana ga [nagai]<sub>F</sub> desu.  
elephant wa<sub>G</sub> nose NOM long.PRS PLT.AUX.PRS  
‘The elephant is such that its nose is [long]<sub>F</sub>.’  
B<sub>b</sub>: #Zoo ga hana {ga/wa} [nagai]<sub>F</sub> desu.  
elephant NOM nose {NOM/wa<sub>G</sub>} long.PRS PLT.AUX.PRS
- (31) A: Kono kusuri wa zutsuu ni kikimasu ka?  
this medicine wa<sub>G</sub> headache DAT take.effect.PLT.PRS DP  
‘Is this medicine effective for headaches?’  
B<sub>a</sub>: Hai, kono kusuri wa zutsuu ga [sugu  
yes this medicine wa<sub>G</sub> headache NOM immediately  
naorimasu]<sub>F</sub>.  
be.cured.PLT.PRS  
‘Yes, this medicine is such that a headache is [relieved immediately]<sub>F</sub>  
with it.’  
B<sub>b</sub>: #Hai, kono kusuri ga zutsuu {ga/wa} [sugu  
yes this medicine NOM headache {NOM/wa<sub>G</sub>} immediately  
naorimasu]<sub>F</sub>.  
be.cured.PLT.PRS

There are two sensible ways to analyze the argument structure(s) involved in MSCs. One possibility is that they involve a single ‘augmented’ list of arguments, whose least oblique member is the major subject and whose second-least oblique member is the

minor subject. Given the amended obliqueness hierarchy shown in 32, the proposed  $wa_G$ -marking principle correctly predicts that  $wa_G$ -marking is applied to the major subject but not to the minor subject in a sentence like 30B or 31B.

- (32) THE OBLIQUENESS HIERARCHY (amended): major subject < minor subject < dative object < accusative or nominative object < adjuncts

Alternatively, one may suppose that MSCs involve an embedding structure, with the predicate on the root level being absent or implicit. That is, one may postulate that 30B<sub>a</sub> and 31B<sub>a</sub> have the structures schematized in 33a,b, respectively.

- (33) a. [<sub>S1</sub> Zoo wa [<sub>S2</sub> hana ga nagai] (Pred.)]  
 b. [<sub>S1</sub> Kono kusuri wa [<sub>S2</sub> zutsuu ga sugu naoru] (Pred.)]

Under this line of analysis, the major subject is the sole argument at the root level, and the minor subject belongs to a separate argument list at a nonroot level. The  $wa_G$ -marking principle is not inconsistent with this possibility, as it does not require any argument at a nonroot level to be  $wa_G$ -marked. It is not clear, however, how the observation that generally a minor subject RESISTS  $wa_G$ -marking can be reconciled with the fact that in many types of embedded clauses, including the complement clause with the marker *to* exemplified in 34B, a nonfocus subject at least ALLOWS  $wa_G$ -marking.

- (34) A: Ken wa watashi ga keisatsukan de aru koto o  
 K.  $wa_G$  I NOM police.officer COP.INF AUX.PRS fact ACC  
 shitte imasu ka?  
 know.GER NPFV.PLT.PRS DP  
 ‘Is Ken aware of the fact that I am a police officer?’  
 B: Ie, Ken wa [anata {ga/wa} [shoobooshi]<sub>F</sub> da] to  
 no K.  $wa_G$  you {NOM/ $wa_G$ } firefighter COP.PRS COMP  
 omotte imasu  
 believe.GER NPFV.PLT.PRS  
 ‘No, Ken believes that you are [a firefighter]<sub>F</sub>.’

The pattern of  $wa_G$ -marking in the MSC thus appears to lend some support to the ‘monostratal’ approach to the construction.

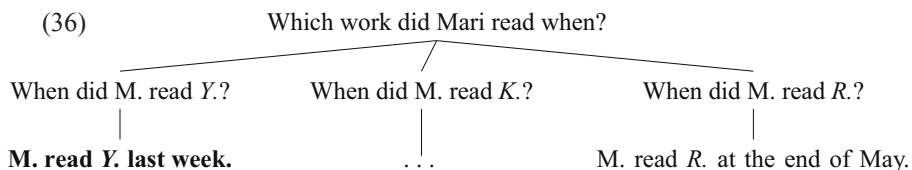
## 5. THEMATIC $wa$ AND CONTRASTIVE-TOPICHOOD.

**5.1. MULTIPLE OCCURRENCES OF THEMATIC  $wa$  IN A CLAUSE.** Sentences like 14B<sub>a,b</sub>, where more than one argument is  $wa_G$ -marked, are acceptable in certain contexts. Example 35 illustrates this point.

- (35) [It is common ground that Mari read the three literary works, *Yukiguni*, *Kokoro*, and *Rashomon* (and nobody else read anything). Interlocutor A says: ‘I heard that Mari read *Rashomon* at the end of May. How about the other two works? ...’]  
 A: Mari ga *Yukiguni* to *Kokoro* o yonda no wa  
 M. NOM Y. and K. ACC read.PST PRO  $wa_G$   
 (sorezore) itsu desu ka?  
 respectively when COP.PLT.PRS DP  
 ‘When is it that Mari read *Yukiguni* and *Kokoro*(, respectively)?’  
 B<sub>a</sub>: Mari **wa** *Yukiguni* {**wa**/??o} [senshuu]<sub>F</sub> yomimashita.  
 M.  $wa_G$  Y. { $wa_G$ /??ACC} last.week read.PLT.PST  
 B<sub>b</sub>: *Yukiguni* {**wa**/??o} Mari **wa** [senshuu]<sub>F</sub> yomimashita.  
 Y. { $wa_G$ /??ACC} M.  $wa_G$  last.week read.PLT.PST  
 ‘Mari read *Yukiguni* [last week]<sub>F</sub>.’



I propose that the occurrences of  $wa_G$  on the objects of 35B<sub>a,b</sub> serve to indicate a contrastive topic in Büring's (2003) sense. The setting of 35 makes it evident that the question that 35B<sub>a,b</sub> addresses (i.e. when Mari read *Yukiguni*) has two 'sisters' that are of current interest (i.e. when she read *Kokoro* and when she read *Rashomon*), so that *Yukiguni* qualifies as a contrastive topic.



In contrast, in the original context of 9, no sister question of the form 'When did Mari read *X*?' (where  $X \neq \textit{Yukiguni}$ ) is prominent, it being assumed that Mari read no work other than *Yukiguni*.

Acknowledging that clauses with more than one occurrence of *wa* necessarily indicate some sort of contrastiveness, Kuno (1973a) makes the following remark:

A given sentence can have only one thematic *wa*: if there is more than one occurrence of *wa* in a sentence, only the first can be thematic: all the rest (and probably the first one also) are contrastive. (Kuno 1973a:48)

I suggest making two amendments to this generalization. The first is to some extent an issue of terminology. As explained in §2, I apply the label 'contrastive *wa*' exclusively to  $wa_F$ —those occurrences of *wa* occurring on focus items. Consequently, none of the occurrences of *wa* in 35 would count as contrastive *wa*, contradicting Kuno's formulation.

The second is concerned with the definition of 'second *wa*'. Is the order here to be based on linear precedence, or on the scale of grammatical hierarchy? While Kuno appears to have in mind the first option, it is the second that leads to empirically more appropriate predictions. The acceptability of 35B<sub>b</sub> with  $wa_G$  on the object indicates that it is the more oblique, rather than the linearly subsequent, of the two  $wa_G$ -marked arguments whose referent is understood to be 'contrasted' with some alternative(s). Note that in the setting of 35, the subject *Mari* does not qualify as a contrastive topic, there being no prominent sister questions of the form 'When did *X* read *Yukiguni*?'.

The following version of the  $wa_G$ -marking principle integrates the effect of contrastive-topichood on  $wa_G$ -marking (as well as that of postfocal reduction).

(37) THE  $wa_G$ -MARKING PRINCIPLE (final version): Let  $\alpha$  be an explicit, nonfocal complement of a given root clause.

- a.  $\alpha$  is  $wa_G$ -marked iff either of conditions (i) and (ii) holds:
  - (i)  $\alpha$  is an argument, and no coargument  $\beta$  of  $\alpha$  is such that  $\beta$  is nonfocal, explicit, and less oblique than  $\alpha$ ;
  - (ii)  $\alpha$  is a contrastive topic.
- b.  $wa_G$ -marking, however, is exempted (is optionally applied) when condition (i) holds but  $\alpha$  occurs within the domain of postfocal reduction.

The principle in 37—like the previous version in 18—dictates that a subject, which is the least oblique argument, be marked with  $wa_G$  whenever it is explicit and nonfocal. As such,  $wa_G$  occurring on a subject does not indicate that it is a topic, in the same way that a label on a bag that says 'fruit' does not indicate (though might suggest the possibility) that the content is an apple. An (explicit) subject may happen to be a ground item AND a contrastive topic (in the same way as the content of the bag may be a fruit AND an apple), but having the first property alone guarantees  $wa_G$ -marking on it. The same

holds for *wa<sub>G</sub>*-marked objects not cooccurring with another *wa<sub>G</sub>*-marked argument, like the one in 38.

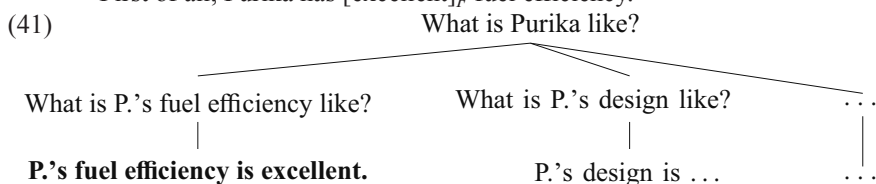
- (38) Matsui-sensei wa watashi ga shootai shimasu.  
 M.-HON.RT *wa<sub>G</sub>* I NOM invite do.PLT.PRS  
 ‘I will invite Dr. Matsui.’

In §4.3, we observed that the ‘minor subject’ of an MSC does not need to be *wa<sub>G</sub>*-marked even when it is a ground item, contrasting with the cases of a regular (sole) subject and a major subject. *Wa<sub>G</sub>*-marking on a minor subject is not impossible, however. Pattern 39a is allowed in some discourse configurations, analogous to pattern 39b; specifically, it is realized when the major subject is a ground item and the minor subject is a contrastive topic.

- (39) a. [<sub>S</sub> [Major Subj.]-*wa<sub>G</sub>* ... [Minor Subj.]-*wa<sub>G</sub>* ... Pred.]  
 b. [<sub>S</sub> [Subj.]-*wa<sub>G</sub>* ... [Obj.]-*wa<sub>G</sub>* ... Pred.]

Example 40 illustrates an utterance that conforms to pattern 39a; note that it can plausibly be situated in a d-tree like the one shown in 41.

- (40) [The speaker is a car critic, and has been asked to evaluate the new car model called Purika in terms of various features, including fuel efficiency, design, driving performance, and safety.]  
 Mazu, Purika **wa** nenpi **wa** [totemo sugurete]<sub>F</sub> imasu.  
 first P. *wa<sub>G</sub>* fuel.efficiency *wa<sub>G</sub>* very excel.GER NPFV.PLT.PRS  
 ‘First of all, Purika has [excellent]<sub>F</sub> fuel efficiency.’



In sum, *wa<sub>G</sub>* typically serves as a marker of groundhood, but it may indicate a contrastive topic in limited configurations. Many authors, including Buring (2003), take a contrastive topic to be a special subcomponent of nonfocus. As such, it can reasonably be said that ‘extra’ *wa<sub>G</sub>*-marking—*wa<sub>G</sub>*-marking on a constituent other than the least oblique ground item—marks a ‘special’ ground item. How exactly the marker *wa<sub>G</sub>* has acquired its dual function, however, is a question that has to be left open for future research.

**5.2. *Wa*-MARKING ON ADJUNCTS.** *Wa<sub>G</sub>* may also occur on adjuncts (i.e. optional complements), such as locative and temporal phrases.

- (42) Daidokoro de (**wa**) Jun ga kukkii o yaite ita.  
 kitchen in (*wa<sub>G</sub>*) J. NOM cookie ACC bake.GER NPFV.PST  
 ‘Jun was baking cookies in the kitchen.’
- (43) Sengetsu (**wa**) kootsuujiko ga ookatta.  
 last.month (*wa<sub>G</sub>*) traffic.accident NOM many.PST  
 ‘Many traffic accidents happened last month.’

It seems sensible to hypothesize that *wa<sub>G</sub>*-marking on an adjunct indicates its contrastive-topichood.

As predicted by the *wa<sub>G</sub>*-marking principle, an argument has to be *wa<sub>G</sub>*-marked if (i) it is the sole explicit nonfocal complement and (ii) it does not occur in the domain of post-



focal reduction. Example 44B(i) sounds somewhat awkward with a repeated explicit subject, but it sounds considerably more natural than 44B(ii) with a *wa<sub>G</sub>*-less subject.

- (44) A: Natsuki ga dooka shita n desu ka?  
 N. NOM somehow do.PST D.AUX COP.PLT.PRS DP  
 ‘Did something happen to Natsuki?’  
 B: Hai. Natsuki {(i) ??ga / (ii) wa } handagote de yubi o  
 yes N. {(i) ??NOM / (ii) wa<sub>G</sub>} soldering.iron with finger ACC  
 yakedo shimashita.  
 burn do.PLT.PST  
 ‘Yes. Natsuki burned her finger with a soldering iron.’

Likewise, 45B<sub>2</sub> sounds considerably more natural with *wa<sub>G</sub>* on the subject.

- (45) A<sub>1</sub>: Ashita, Nagoya de nanika omoshiroi ibento wa  
 tomorrow N. in something interesting.PRS event wa<sub>G</sub>  
 arimasu ka?  
 exist.PLT.PRS DP  
 ‘Is there any interesting event in Nagoya tomorrow?’  
 B<sub>1</sub>: Soodesune, Geijutsu-Gekijoo de Fujita ga Beetooben no  
 let.me.see Art-Theater at F. NOM Beethoven GEN  
 pianokyoosookyoku o ensoo shimasu.  
 piano.concerto ACC perform do.PLT.PRS  
 ‘Let me see, Fujita will perform a Beethoven piano concerto at the Art Theater.’  
 A<sub>2</sub>: Moo sukoshi kuwashiku oshiete kudasai.  
 more a.bit detailed.INF teach.GER BEN.IMP  
 ‘Tell me some more details, please.’  
 B<sub>2</sub>: Hai, wakarimashita. Fujita {??ga/wa} (Beetooben no  
 yes understand.PLT.PST F. {??NOM/wa<sub>G</sub>} Beethoven GEN  
 pianokyoosookyoku) yoban o ensoo shimasu. Oke  
 piano.concerto no.4 ACC perform do.PLT.PRS orchestra  
 wa Nagoya-Firu desu.  
 wa<sub>G</sub> Nagoya-Philharmonic.Orchestra COP.PRS  
 ‘Yes, I got it. Fujita will perform (Beethoven’s Piano Concerto) No. 4. The orchestra is Nagoya Philharmonic Orchestra.’

However, the same does not hold for (at least some types of) adjuncts, including locative phrases with the particle *de*. Example 46B(i) is somewhat awkward with a repeated locative phrase, but it sounds considerably more natural than 46B(ii) with *wa<sub>G</sub>*-marking.

- (46) A: Rikashitsu de nanika atta n desu ka?  
 science.room in something exist.PST D.AUX COP.PRS DP  
 ‘Did something happen in the science room?’  
 B: Hai. Rikashitsu de {(i) Ø / (ii) ??wa} Natsuki ga handagote  
 yes science.room in {(i) Ø / (ii) ??wa<sub>G</sub>} N. NOM soldering.iron  
 de yubi o yakedo shimashita.  
 with finger ACC burn do.PLT.PST  
 ‘Yes. Natsuki burned her finger with a soldering iron in the science room.’

Likewise, 47B<sub>2</sub> sounds considerably more natural without *wa<sub>G</sub>* on the locative phrase.

- (47) A<sub>1</sub>: Ashita, Nagoya de nanika omoshiroi ibento wa  
tomorrow N. in something interesting.PRS event *wa<sub>G</sub>*  
arimasu ka?  
exist.PLT.PRS DP

‘Is there any interesting event in Nagoya tomorrow?’

- B<sub>1</sub>: Soodesune, Geijutsu-Gekijoo de wakate no pianusuto ga  
let.me.see Art-Theater at young COP.ATTR pianist NOM  
Purokofiefu no pianokyoosookyoku niban o ensoo  
Prokofiev GEN piano.concerto no.2 ACC perform  
shimasu.  
do.PLT.PRS

‘Let me see, a young pianist will perform Prokofiev’s Piano Concerto No. 2 at the Art Theater.’

- A<sub>2</sub>: Moo sukoshi kuwashiku oshiete kudasai.  
more a.bit detailed.INF teach.GER BEN.IMP  
‘Tell me some more details, please.’

- B<sub>2</sub>: Hai, wakarimashita. Geijutsu-Gekijoo de (??*wa*) Kobayashi  
yes understand.PLT.PST Art-Theater at (??*wa<sub>G</sub>*) K.  
toiu pianisuto ga (Purokofiefu no) niban o ensoo  
called pianist NOM Prokofiev GEN no.2 ACC perform  
shimasu. Oke wa Nagoya-Firu  
do.PLT.PRS orchestra *wa<sub>G</sub>* Nagoya-Philharmonic.Orchestra  
desu.  
COP.PRS

‘Yes, I got it. A pianist called Kobayashi will perform (Prokofiev’s) No. 2 at the Art Theater. The orchestra is Nagoya Philharmonic Orchestra.’

Example 46B(ii) is felicitous and is more appropriate than 46B(i) as a (partial) answer to 48A.

- (48) A: Rikashitsu to taiikukan de nanika atta n desu  
science.room and gymnasium in something exist.PST D.AUX COP.PRS  
ka?  
DP

‘Did something happen in the science room and in the gym?’

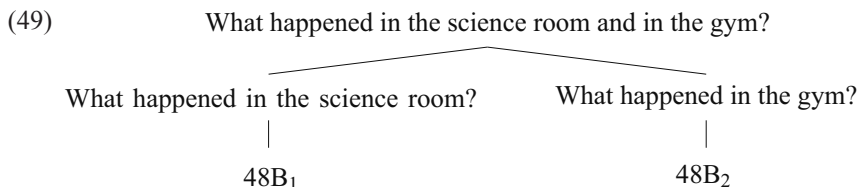
- B<sub>1</sub>: Hai. Rikashitsu de ??(*wa*) Natsuki ga handagote de  
yes science.room in ??(*wa<sub>G</sub>*) N. NOM soldering.iron with  
yubi o yakedo shimashita.  
finger ACC burn do.PLT.PST

‘Yes. In the science room, Natsuki burned her finger with a soldering iron.’

- B<sub>2</sub>: Taiikukan de ??(*wa*), Shigeo ga koronde ashi o hinetta  
gymnasium in ??(*wa<sub>G</sub>*) S. NOM fall.GER foot ACC twist.PST  
mitai desu.  
EVID.AUX COP.PLT.PRS

‘In the gym, it appears that Shigeo fell and sprained his ankle.’

Note that *rikashitsu de* in 48B<sub>1</sub> and *taiikukan de* in 48B<sub>2</sub> qualify as contrastive topics, 48B<sub>1,2</sub> being part of a d-tree like 49.



These observations suggest that an adjunct is *wa<sub>G</sub>*-marked only when it is a contrastive topic. The *wa<sub>G</sub>*-marking principle accounts for this pattern without further amendment. Since condition (i) in 37 is concerned only with arguments, *wa<sub>G</sub>*-marking on an adjunct is predicted to take place only when it is a contrastive topic.

It is, however, possible to find instances of *wa<sub>G</sub>*-marked adjuncts whose status as a contrastive topic is questionable. Examples 50 and 51 illustrate this point.

(50) [Context: A and B are friends; they meet up at a downtown restaurant.]

A: Kuruma wa doko ni tometa no?

car *wa<sub>G</sub>* where DAT park.PST D.AUX

‘Where did (you) park (your) car?’

B: Iya, kyoo ?(wa) chikatetsu de kita.

INTJ today ?(*wa<sub>G</sub>*) subway by come.PST

‘Well, I took the subway today.’

(51) [Context: The interlocutors are traveling in a countryside region. The speaker reads a travel brochure and says:]

Kono chiiki de ??(wa) shoogatsu ni sanma no sushi o taberu

this region in ??(*wa<sub>G</sub>*) new.year DAT saury GEN sushi ACC eat.PRS

ndatte.

EVID.P

‘(It says that) in this region they eat sushi with saury in the New Year.’

In the context of 50B, no ‘sister questions’ regarding what means of transport interlocutor B used or will use on other days/occasions appear to be particularly prominent. Likewise, 51 does not suggest that the interlocutors have addressed or will address what the food culture or traditions in some other regions are like. Two possibilities seem to be open here. One may maintain that the *wa<sub>G</sub>*-phrases here do count as contrastive topics, with relevant sister questions being tacitly accommodated. Alternatively, one may concede that *wa<sub>G</sub>*-marking on adjuncts could be motivated by factors other than contrastive-topichood; a corrective tone, present in 50B, and the utterance’s being about an atemporally holding feature of the referent of the *wa<sub>G</sub>*-marked element, which is the case in 51, could be of relevance. I leave this issue open to future research.

**6. HOW OFTEN DOES *wa* MARK A TOPIC?** It has been argued that *wa<sub>G</sub>*-marking may indicate either groundhood or contrastive-topichood. *Wa<sub>G</sub>* occurring on a (regular or ‘major’) subject invariably indicates groundhood. *Wa<sub>G</sub>* occurring on an object, or on a ‘minor subject’, may indicate either groundhood or contrastive-topichood, depending on whether there is a less oblique *wa<sub>G</sub>*-marked argument in the same clause. *Wa<sub>G</sub>*-marking on adjuncts appears to be more directly concerned with contrastive-topichood than with groundhood, although the exact conditions under which it takes place remain an open issue.

To get an idea of how often *wa* indicates groundhood and contrastive-topichood, I conducted a corpus survey on the NINJAL Parsed Corpus of Modern Japanese<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> <http://npcmj.ninjal.ac.jp/interfaces> (checked on July 20th, 2020)

(NPCMJ; the 2020 version, 560,098 words), which includes rich syntactic annotation. The following is the breakdown of the collected *wa*-phrases.<sup>6</sup>

- (52) a. 13,890 occurrences of *wa*-marked matrix-clause subjects, among which  
       (i) Ten are ‘minor’ subjects cooccurring with a *wa*-marked ‘major’ subject, and  
       (ii) 13,880 are not;  
       b. 677 occurrences of *wa*-marked matrix-clause objects, among which  
       (i) 107 cooccur with a less oblique *wa*-marked coargument,<sup>7</sup> and  
       (ii) 570 do not;  
       c. 2,938 occurrences of *wa*-marked matrix-clause adjuncts.

These may contain some instances of *wa<sub>F</sub>*, which cannot be easily identified because *wa<sub>G</sub>* and *wa<sub>F</sub>* are not tagged differently in the corpus. However, it seems reasonable to assume that the proportion of *wa<sub>F</sub>* is relatively small, and thus it is unlikely that the occurrences of *wa<sub>F</sub>* weigh heavily on one of, or on a particular subset of, the types listed in 52. The ratio of (a) the sum of 52a(ii) and 52b(ii) and (b) the sum of 52a(i), 52b(i), and 52c thus can be taken to be a good approximation of the ratio of ground-marking *wa<sub>G</sub>* and contrastive topic-marking *wa<sub>G</sub>*, though it may overestimate the ratio of the latter because 52c may contain a good number of cases where *wa<sub>G</sub>* does not mark a contrastive topic.

$$(53) (13,880 + 570) : (10 + 107 + 2,938) \approx 4.73 : 1$$

It can be concluded that the particle *wa* most often—as often as at least some five times in six, to be more specific—merely indicates groundhood, rather than (contrastive-) topichood.

**7. SUMMARY.** It was argued that the Japanese particle *wa* in its so-called thematic use most often does not mark a topic, and that it is the notion of contrastive topic, rather than aboutness topic, that is relevant to the licensing of *wa*. Thematic *wa* sometimes indicates groundhood and sometimes contrastive-topichood, and which it indicates when is determined by a principle that references the obliqueness hierarchy of grammatical functions, as far as *wa*-marking on arguments at the root level is concerned. Thematic *wa* has been widely regarded as a paradigmatic example of a marker of (aboutness) topic. The proposal to dismiss this supposition will hopefully stimulate crosslinguistic, as well as language-specific, discussions of information structure in future inquiries.

<sup>6</sup> The following Tgrep-lite expressions were used on the tree search interface of the corpus to obtain these results.

- (i) a. [PP-SBJ] < [P (-OPTR) < wa] > [IP-MAT]  
       (13,890 hits of *wa*-marked matrix-clause subjects)  
       b. [PP-SBJ2] < ([P-OPTR] < wa) > ([IP-MAT] < ([PP-SBJ] < ([P-OPTR] < wa))  
       (10 hits of ‘minor’ subjects cooccurring with a *wa*-marked ‘major’ subject)  
       c. [PP-OB] < ([P-OPTR] < wa) > [IP-MAT]  
       (677 hits of *wa*-marked matrix-clause objects)  
       d. [PP-OB] < ([P-OPTR] < wa) > ([IP-MAT] < ([PP-SBJ] < ([P-OPTR] < wa))  
       (107 hits of *wa*-marked matrix-clause objects cooccurring with a *wa*-marked subject)  
       e. [PP-OB2] < ([P-OPTR] < wa) > ([IP-MAT] < ([PP-OB1] < ([P-OPTR] < wa))  
       (0 hits of *wa*-marked matrix-clause objects cooccurring with a less oblique *wa*-marked object)  
       f. [PP] != [PP-SBJ] != [PP-OB] < ([P-OPTR] < wa) > [IP-MAT]  
       (2,938 hits of *wa*-marked adjuncts)

<sup>7</sup> In all of these 107 occurrences, the less oblique argument is a subject. The corpus contained no clause with two *wa*-marked objects.

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