TOPICS, CONTRAST, AND CONTRASTIVE TOPICS IN JAPANESE

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1 Introduction

The Japanese particle *wa* is widely considered a topic marker. The particle has two uses: thematic and contrastive (Kuno 1973). Thematic *wa*-phrases are unstressed, typically occupy clause-initial position and are what the rest of the sentence is about (Reinhart 1981). Contrastive *wa*-phrases bear an emphatic stress, can remain in-situ and implicate contrast (Saito 1985, Hoji 1985, Tomioka 2007a,b, Watanabe 2003):

(1) thematic *wa*:
    a. sono hon$_i$-wa John-ga e_i katta.
        that book-wa John-nom   bought
    b. #John-ga   sono hon-wa   katta.
        John-nom   that book-wa   bought
        'Speaking of that book, John bought it.'

(2) contrastive *wa*:
    a. SONO HON$_i$-WA   John-ga t_i katta.   (SMALL CAPS = emphatic stress)
        that book-wa   John-nom   bought
    b. John-ga   SONO HON-WA   katta.
        John-nom   that book-wa   bought
        'John bought that book.'

The two types of *wa*-phrases are generally analysed as two distinct types of topics: aboutness topics and contrastive topics (See Heycock to app. for overview of the literature). Indeed, other than bearing the same particle, they appear not to share any properties either in their interpretation or in their syntactic distribution.

In this paper, I argue that:

- Contrastive topics are what the rest of the sentence is about.

- Contrastive topics must also appear in clause-initial position;

$\Rightarrow$ Only those contrastive *wa*-phrases in clause-initial position are contrastive 'topics'.

In doing so, I will show that...

- In contexts that require contrastive topics, contrastive *wa*-phrases must appear in clause-initial position and they are interpreted as what the rest of the sentence is about;

- In contexts that license contrastive *wa*-phrases in-situ, the *wa*-phrases cannot be fronted;

- Only contrastive *wa*-phrases in clause-initial position are subject to constraints on topics at the syntax-information structure interface.

2 Contrastive Topics in Contexts

In contexts where a *wa*-phrase is interpreted as a contrastive topic, it must appear in clause-initial position. The exchange in (3)/(4) forces *Bill-wa* to be a contrastive topic, as it shifts the topic of discourse from *John* (Jackendoff 1972, Büring 1997, 2003) (Note: *John-wa* in (3) is an aboutness topic).[1]

(3) John-wa kinoo-no   party-de nani-o   tabeta no?
     John-wa yesterday-gen party-at   what-acc ate   Q
     'what did John eat at the party yesterday?'
(4) Hmm, John-wa doo-ka   sira-nai-kedo,
     well,   John-wa how-whether know-not-but,
     'Well, I don't know about John, but...'
    a. BILL-WA 8-zi-goro   MAME-O tabeteita   (yo)
        Bill-wa 8 o'clock-around beans-acc was.eating   particle
    b. #MAME$_i$-O   BILL-WA 8-zi-goro t_i tabeteita   (yo)
        beans-acc   Bill-wa 8 o'clock-around   was.eating   particle
        'as for Bill, he was eating beans around 8 o'clock.'

(5)/(6) shows the same observation for a context where the object is a contrastive topic:

(5) kinoo-no   party-de dare-ga pasta-o   tabeta no?
     yesterday-gen party-at   who-nom pasta-acc ate   Q
     'Who ate the pasta at the party yesterday?'
(6) Hmm, pasta-wa doo-ka   sira-nai-kedo,
     well,   pasta-top how-whether know-not-but,
     'Well, I don't know about the pasta, but...'
    a. #BILL-GA   MAME-WA 8-zi-goro   tabeteita   (yo)[2]
        Bill-nom   beans-wa 8 o'clock-around   eating   particle
    b. MAME$_i$-WA   BILL-GA 8-zi-goro t_i tabeteita   (yo)
        beans-wa   Bill-nom 8 o'clock-around   eating   particle
        'as for the beans, Bill was eating them around 8 o'clock.'

[1] The set-up of the context is due to Neeleman & van de Koot (to app.)
[2] For reasons unknown to me, an object *wa*-phrase prefers not to surface adjacent to a verb. In order to circumvent this issue, adverbials are inserted between object and verb throughout. I assume following Neeleman & Reinhart (1998), that such structure as (6a) can be base-generated, hence the absence of an empty position below the adverbial.

Thus, contrastive *wa*-phrase, when interpreted as a contrastive 'topic', cannot remain in-situ. Like aboutness topics then, contrastive topics must appear in clause-initial position (See Vermeulen (2007) for explicit arguments that thematic *wa*-phrases must also occupy clause-initial position). I propose that a constraint like the following is operative in Japanese:

(7)   Topic is licensed in clause-initial position.

3 Contrastive *wa*-phrases in-situ

3.1 *Interpretation of contrastive wa-phrases in-situ*

There has recently been much work on the precise interpretation of contrastive *wa*-phrases (Kuroda 2005, Hara 2006, to app., Hara & van Rooij 2007, Tomioka 2007b, Oshima to app.). Adapting Büring's (1997) analysis of contrastive topics in German, Hara (2006), for instance, argues that sentences containing contrastive *wa* induces the presupposition that a scalar alternative stronger than the assertion exists and also the implicature that the stronger alternative could be false. Data considered in the literature involve predominantly cases where subject bears *WA*. However, the analyses can be carried over to object *wa*-phrases.

(8)   WA (Hara 2006, to app.)
       a. Presupposition: There is a stronger scalar alternative.
       b. Implicature: The negation of the stronger alternative is possible

(9)   John-ga   NANNINKA-WA   tasuketa
       John-nom   some.people-wa   helped
       'John helped some people (Implicature: John didn't help everyone.')

       a. ∃(x) [[person(x)] [helped (j, x)]]
       b. stronger scalar alternative:∀(x) [[person(x)] [helped (j, x)]]
       c. (b) can be false.

The analysis can be extended to non-quantified DPs:

(10)   John-ga   MARY-WA tasuketa
       John-nom   Mary-wa   helped
       'John helped Mary'
       (Implicature: 'John didn't help Bill' in a context where only Mary and Bill are the relevant individuals)

       a. stronger alternative: 'John helped both Mary and Bill'
       b. (a) could be false
       c. the speaker asserted 'John helped Mary', so by inference, 'John did not help Bill'.

However, there is nothing inherent in the contrastive interpretation itself that makes a contrastive *wa*-phrase a topic, as noted/argued by some (e.g. Hara 2006, Kuroda 1992, 2005, Yamato 2007, Oshima to app.). I claim that those in clause-initial position are interpreted additionally as topics, i.e. what the rest of the sentence is about. In other words, the topic interpretation and the particular contrastive interpretation are two independent features of a "contrastive topic" (Kuroda 2005, Hara 2006, Tomioka 2007b, Vallduví & Vilkuna 1998, Molnár 2002)

The relevance of aboutness for interpreting contrastive topics is made explicit in the English translations of the preceding sentences in (4) and (6), *I don't know about John*, and *I don't know about the pasta*.

3.2 *Contrastive wa-phrases in-situ can't move*

The proposal predicts then that contrastive *wa*-phrases that appear in-situ cannot optionally move to clause-initial position, because they are not contrastive topics and there is no trigger for the movement. The prediction is borne out. In (11)/(12), (14) and (14), *wa*-phrases are used purely for contrast and are not interpreted as what the rest of the sentence is about (Yamato 2007). ((14) is modified from Kuno (1973: 46) attributed to Minoru Nakau (p.c.). This example shows contrast can be projected a larger constituent).

(11)   dare-ga   ziken-genba-de   tasuke-no tetudai-o   sita no
       who-nom   accident-scene-to   rescue-gen help-acc   did Q
       'Who was helping with the rescue operation at the accident scene?'
(12)   a. JOHN-GA 3-NIN-WA   nantoka   tasuketa
          John-nom 3-cl.-wa   somehow rescuing.was
       b. #3-NIN$_i$-WA   John-ga   nantoka   t$_i$ tasuketa[34]
          three-people-wa John-nom somehow   rescue
          'John somehow managed to rescue at least three people.'

(13)   a. John-ga   sono hon-o   KAI-WA   sita-ga, sonoba-de sore-o   YOMI-WA sinakatta.
          John-nom that book-acc buy-wa   did-but there-at   it-acc   read-wa   did-not
       b. #KAI$_i$-WA John-ga sono hon-o t$_i$ sita-ga, YOMI$_j$-WA sonoba-de sore-o t$_j$ sinakatta
          buy-wa   John-nom that book-acc did-but read-wa   there-at   it-acc   did-not
          'John bought that book, but he didn't read it there.'

(14)   a. [AME-WA hutteita-ga] [John-ga KASA-WA   motte-ika-nakatta] (hanasi)
          rain-wa   falling-but   John-nom umbrella-wa   bring-go-not.past   (story)
       b. #[AME-WA hutteita-ga] [KASA$_i$-WA   John-ga   t$_i$ motte-ika-nakatta] (hanasi)
          rain-wa   falling-but   umbrella-wa John-nom   bring-go-not.past   (story)
          '(The story that) It was raining, but John did not bring an umbrella.'

4 Syntax-Information Structure Interface

It is well-known that at the level of information structure, a focus-background structure can be contained in a comment, but a topic-comment structure cannot be part of a background, (Lambrecht 1994, Hajičová, et al 1998).

(15)   *Information Structure*
       a. topic [$_{comment}$ FOCUS   [$_{background}$ … …]]
       b. *FOCUS [$_{background}$ topic   [$_{comment}$ … …]]

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[3] This example is felicitous if *3-nin* 'three people' refers to three specific people who may be salient in the discourse. The crucial reading here is where *3-nin* 'three people' receives the contrastive 'at least' reading.
[4] Miyagawa (2006) shows that scrambling of a non-*wa*-marked object in a similar context is ruled out. However, if *WA* generally marks contrastive topics, as widely assumed, and can appear in-situ, as in (a), then it should be possible to front it.

It has been argued by Rizzi (1997) and Neeleman & van de Koot (To app), that the sister constituent of a fronted topic is interpreted as the comment, while the sister constituent of a fronted focus is interpreted as the background:

(16) *Syntax – Information structure*

a. XP$_i$ [$_{YP}$ t$_i$]
    |
  Topic   comment

b. XP$_i$ [$_{YP}$ t$_i$]

  Focus   background

These two considerations together make predictions regarding the syntactic distribution of topic and focus: a focus can follow a fronted topic, but a topic cannot follow a fronted focus:

(17) *Syntax*
   a. topic$_i$ [$_{YP}$ FOCUS   t$_i$]
   b. *FOCUS$_i$ [$_{YP}$ topic   t$_i$]
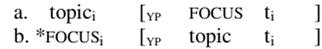
Examples involving embedded clauses demonstrate that the prediction in ((17)b) is correct. Moreover, only those contrastive *wa*-phrases in clause-initial position display the predicted distribution of 'topic'.

A contrastive topic can appear inside an embedded clause. The context in (18) makes *kono CD* 'this CD' a contrastive topic in (19), as it shifts the topic from *the book* in the embedded clause.

(18) Context: John finds a book on Sue's desk and he asks Bill to tell him something about the book, perhaps with the intention of finding out where Sue obtained the book. Bill does not know anything about the book, but he knew how Sue obtained a CD that was also on the desk. So, he decides to tell John about the CD. In describing this situation, you utter (19).

(19) Bill$_j$-wa   [$_{CP}$ KONO CD$_i$-WA   Mary-ga   kare$_j$-no mise-de Sue-ni   t$_i$ ageta to]   itta.
Bill-wa   this CD-wa   Mary-nom   he-gen shop-at Sue-to   gave that   said
'Bill$_j$ said that as for this CD, Mary gave it to Sue in his$_j$ shop.'

Independently, a focus can move out of an embedded clause to sentence-initial position:

(20) Bill$_j$-wa [$_{CP}$ Mary-ga   Jane-ni kono CD-o   kare$_j$-no mise-de ageta to]   itta
Bill-wa   Mary-nom   Jane-to this CD-acc   he-gen shop-at   gave that   said
'Bill$_j$ said Mary gave this CD to Jane in his$_j$ shop'

(21) Tigau-yo,   SUE$_i$-NI Bill$_j$-wa [$_{CP}$ Mary-ga   t$_i$ kono CD-o   kare$_j$-no mise-de
incorrect-prt, Sue-to Bill-wa   Mary-nom   this CD-acc   he-gen shop-at
ageta   to]   itta (ndayo)
gave   that   said (prt)
Lit.: 'No, it's to Sue that Bill$_j$ said that Mary gave this CD in his$_j$ shop.'

However, it should be impossible to combine these two operations, as this will result in a structure like the following:

(22) *Foc$_i$ [... [$_{CP}$ Top$_j$ ... t$_i$ t$_j$ ...]]
         ‿‿‿‿‿‿‿‿‿‿‿
           Background
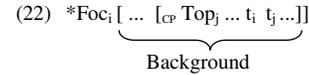
The prediction is borne out:

(23) Bill$_k$-wa [$_{CP}$ Mary-ga   Jane-ni kono hon-o   kare$_k$-no mise-de   ageta to]   itta
Bill-wa   Mary-nom   Jane-to this book-acc he-gen shop-at   gave that   said
'Bill$_k$ said that Mary gave this book to Jane in his$_k$ shop.'

(24) Tigau-yo,   Bill-wa sono hon-nituite-wa sira-nakat-ta-ga...
incorrect-prt   Bill-wa that book-about-wa know-not-past-but
'No, Bill didn't know anything about the book, but...'
*SUE$_i$-NI   Bill$_k$-wa [$_{CP}$ KONO CD$_j$-WA   Mary-ga   kare$_k$-no mise-de t$_i$ t$_j$ ageta to] itta.
Sue-to   Bill-wa   this CD-wa   Mary-nom he-gen shop-at   gave that   said
Lit.: 'it's to Sue that Bill$_k$ said that as for this CD, Mary gave it in his$_k$ shop.'

* Foc$_i$ ...[$_{CP}$ WA$_j$ ...   t$_i$ t$_j$ ...]   (WA = topic)

Crucially, the sentence is acceptable if the focus remains in-situ:

(25) Bill$_k$-wa [$_{CP}$ KONO CD$_j$-WA   Mary-ga   kare$_k$-no mise-de SUE$_i$-NI t$_j$ ageta to] itta.
Bill-wa   this CD-wa   Mary-nom   he-gen shop-at Sue-to   gave that   said
'Bill$_k$ said that as for this CD, Mary gave it to Sue in his$_k$ shop.'

✓ [$_{CP}$ WA$_j$ ... Foc   t$_j$ ...]   (WA = topic)

On the other hand, if the contrastive *wa*-phrase remains in-situ in the embedded clause, the embedded focus can be fronted to sentence-initial position. This is unexpected if all contrastive *wa*-phrases were contrastive topics.

(26) Bill$_j$-wa [$_{CP}$ Mary-ga   Jane-ni sukunakutomo   3-NIN-WA   kare$_j$-no mise-de
Bill-wa   Mary-nom Jane-to at.lesat   3-cl.-wa   he-gen shop-at
syookai-sita to] itta
introduced   that said
'Bill said that Mary introduced at least three people to Jane in his shop.'

(27) $^?$Tigau-yo,   SUE$_i$-NI Bill$_j$-wa   [$_{CP}$ Mary-ga   t$_i$ sukunakutomo   3-NIN-WA
Incorrect-prt, Sue-to Bill-wa   Mary-nom   at.least   3-cl.-wa
kare$_j$-no mise-de   syookai-sita   to]   itta-ndayo
he-gen shop-at   introduced   that   said-prt
'No, it is to Sue that Bill said that Mary introduced at least three people in his shop.'

✓ Foc$_i$ ...   [$_{CP}$ ... t$_i$ WA ...]   (WA ≠ topic)

5 Nominalized VP-*wa*'s

Verbs can be marked with *wa*, but only the latter can be fronted:

(28) a. Bill-ga   sono hon-o   kinoo   KAI-WA   sita.
       Bill-nom   that book-acc yesterday buy-wa   did
     b. * KAI$_i$-WA   Bill-ga   sono hon-o   kinoo   t$_i$ sita.
         buy-wa   Bill-nom   that book-acc yesterday   did
       'Bill bought the book yesterday.' (but he hasn't read it)

A verb nominalized by the nominalizer *no* and be marked by *wa*:

(29) Bill-ga   sono hon-o   KAU-NO-WA   kinoo   sita.
     Bill-nom   that book-acc buy-nmz-wa   yesterday did
     'Bill did buying of the book yesterday.'

It seems however that the VP is nominalized rather than the verb alone:

(30) Bill-ga   [$_{NP}$ [$_{VP}$ sono hon-o   (*kinoo)   KAU]-NO]-WA   mati-de   sita.
     Bill-nom   that book-acc yesterday buy-nmz-wa   town-at   did

(31) a. *KAU-NO$_i$-WA   Bill-ga   sono hon-o   t$_i$ mati-de   sita.
         buy-nmz-wa   Bill-nom   that book-acc   town-at   did
     b. [sono hon-o   KAU-NO]$_i$-WA   Bill-ga   mati-de   t$_i$ sita.
        that book-acc   buy-nmz-wa   Bill-nom   town-at   did
       Lit.: 'Bill did the buying of the book yesterday.' (but not the reading of it)

5.1 Nominalized VP-*wa* in context

In a context that requires a nominalized VP to be a contrastive topic, it must be fronted to clause initial position.

(32) Dare-ga   syokuzi-o   tukutta   no?
     who-nom   meal-acc   made   Q
     'Who cooked the meal?'

(33) Hmm, tukuru-no-wa   doo-da-ka   sira-nai-kedo
     well, cook-nmz-wa   how-cop-weather   know-not-but
     'Well, I don't know about cooking (it), but...'
     a. #BILL-GA   [$_{NP}$ [$_{VP}$ zairyoo-o   KAU]-NO-WA   mati-de sita
        Bill-nom   ingredients-acc buy-nmz-wa   town-in did
     b. [$_{NP}$ [$_{VP}$ zairyoo-o   KAU]-NO]$_i$-WA   BILL-GA   mati-de t$_i$ sita
           ingredients-acc buy-nmz-wa   Bill-nom   town-in   did
       'As for buying the ingredients, John did it in town.'

5.2 Nominalized VP-*wa* in-situ can't move:

In a contexts where a nominalized VP-*wa* appears in-situ, it cannot be optionally fronted:

(34) kyoo-no   kateeka-no   zyugyoo-wa   doo   desita   ka?
     Today-gen home.economics-gen class-wa   how   was   Q
     'How was today's home economics class?'

(35) a. John-ga   [$_{NP}$ [$_{VP}$ ryoori-o   narau]-no]-wa   yorokonde sita-kedo,
        John-nom   cooking-acc learn-nmz-wa   happily   did-but
        [$_{NP}$ [$_{VP}$ sara-o   katazukeru]-no]-wa zurui-koto-ni-mo   si-nakat-ta. (koto)
           dishes-acc clear.up-nmz-wa   cheekily   do-not-past (fact)
     b. #[$_{NP}$ [$_{VP}$ ryoori-o   narau]-no]-wa   John-ga   yorokonde sita-kedo,
           cooking-acc learn-nmz-wa   John-nom happily   did-but
        [$_{NP}$ [$_{VP}$ sara-o   katazukeru]-no]-wa zurui-koto-ni-mo   si-nakat-ta. (koto)
           dishes-acc clear.up-nmz-wa   cheekily   do-not-past (fact)
       Lit.: 'John happily did the learning of cooking, but cheekily didn't do clearing of the plates.'

5.3 Syntax-information structure interface

It is not possible to test the prediction in (22), repeated below.

(22) *Foc$_i$ [... [$_{CP}$ Top$_j$ ... t$_i$ t$_j$ ...]]
                  Background

Testing this prediction requires the embedded verb to be ditransitive so that one of its arguments can be fronted as focus and the other can remain inside the nominalized VP. Subject can't undergo focus fronting, as subjects generally cannot undergo movement in Japanese (Saito 1985).

But, independently, it is not possible to nominalize a VP headed by a ditransitive verb with only one of its arguments, mark it with *wa* and front it.

(36) a. *[$_{NP}$ [$_{VP}$ CD-O   AGERU]-NO]$_i$-WA   John-ga   Mary-ni   t$_i$ sita.
            CD-acc   give-nmz-wa   John-nom   Mary-to   did
        Lit.: 'As for giving a CD, John did to Mary.'
     b. *[$_{NP}$ [$_{VP}$ MARY-NI AGERU]-NO]$_i$-WA   John-ga   CD-o   t$_i$ sita.
            Mary-to give-nmz-wa   John-nom   CD-acc   did
        Lit.: 'As for giving Mary, John did a CD.'

(37) a. *[$_{NP}$ [$_{VP}$ JANE-O   SYOOKAISURU]-NO]$_i$-WA   Mary-ga   Bill-ni   t$_i$ sita
            Jane-acc   introduce-nmz-wa   Mary-nom   Bill-to   did
        Lit.: 'As for introducing Jane, Mary did to Bill.'
     b. *[$_{NP}$ [$_{VP}$ BILL-NI   SYOOKAISURU]-NO]$_i$-WA   Mary-ga   Jane-ni   t$_i$ sita.
            Bill-to   introduce-nmz-wa   Mary-nom   Jane-acc   did
        Lit.: 'As for introducing to Bill, Mary did Jane.'

6 Conclusion

- Like aboutness topics, contrastive topics in Japanese must appear in clause-initial position;

- Like aboutness topics, contrastive topics are what the rest of the sentence is about;

- Contrastive *wa*-phrases in-situ are not contrastive topics;

- *wa* is not a topic marker.

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