

*Japanese wa-phrases that aren't topics**

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Abstract

The Japanese particle *wa* is widely considered a marker for topic. This paper presents new evidence that contrary to this general view, *wa* does not only mark topic, but it also marks items that are simply discourse anaphoric. The evidence comes from the observation that a *wa*-phrase displays distinct syntactic behaviour depending on whether it is interpreted as a topic or discourse anaphoric. It is furthermore argued that topics in Japanese, contrastive or not, must appear in clause-initial position, which, as will be demonstrated, has the desired consequence that a clause may contain no more than one topic.

1 Introduction

The Japanese particle *wa* has been considered at least since Kuroda (1965) to be 'the' marker for topic in this language. In this paper, I argue that it does not in fact only mark topic: it also marks items that are simply discourse anaphoric independently of whether they are also topics. I will demonstrate that the pragmatic consideration of whether a given *wa*-phrase is interpreted as a topic or discourse anaphoric dictates the syntactic distribution of the phrase.

It is well-known that at the level of information structure, a topic-comment structure cannot be part of a background, but a focus-background structure can be inside a comment, an observation that was initially noted by the Prague School (Lambrecht 1994, Hajičová, et al 1998). In relation to how such constraints may be represented in the syntax, it has been argued by Rizzi (1997), and more recently by Neeleman & van de Koot (to appear), that the sister constituent of a fronted topic is interpreted as the comment, and that of a fronted focus is interpreted as the background. These two considerations together make predictions regarding the syntactic distribution of topic and focus, which are schematised in (1): a focus can

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follow a fronted topic, but a topic cannot follow a fronted focus. Neeleman & van de Koot show in detail that the predictions are borne out for Dutch. The cross-linguistic observation that topics generally precede foci also partially confirm these predictions (Hajičová, et al 1998).

- (1) a. topic_i [_{comment} FOCUS [_{background} t_i]]
 b. *FOCUS_i [_{background} topic [_{comment} t_i]]

In Japanese, however, a phrase marked with the putative topic marker *wa* can follow a fronted focus. In both of the following examples, taking a constituent that answers the *wh*-part of an immediately preceding question to be focus, the object *John-o* ‘John-acc’ is a focus. As shown in (2b), it is possible for a *wa*-phrase to follow it. Small capitals indicate stress.

- (2) sono inu-ga dare-o kande-simatta no?
 that dog-nom who-acc bite-closed Q
 ‘Who did the dog bite?’
 a. sono inu-wa kinoo kooen-de JOHN-O kande-simatta
 that dog-wa yesterday park-at John-acc bite-closed
 b. JOHN_i-O sono inu-wa kinoo kooen-de t_i kande-simatta
 John-acc that dog-wa yesterday park-at bite-closed
 ‘The dog bit John in the park yesterday.’

Thus, either the predictions in (1) are not correct for Japanese or the post-focal *wa*-phrase in (2b) is something other than a topic. I will argue for the latter position. More specifically, I claim that in sentences such as above, only the pre-focal *wa*-phrase is a topic, in the sense that it is what the rest of the sentence is about, while the post-focal *wa*-phrase is simply a discourse anaphoric item, in the sense that it has been previously mentioned (Reinhart 1981, Lambrecht 1994). The claim is based on the evidence that a *wa*-phrase that is interpreted as discourse anaphoric has a different syntactic distribution from one that is interpreted as a topic, and that a post-focal *wa*-phrase behaves like a discourse anaphoric *wa*-phrase.

On the basis of this syntactic evidence, I will argue furthermore that a topic *wa*-phrase must always appear in clause-initial position, while non-topical *wa*-phrases need not. This implies that there can be only one topic per clause, as there is only one clause-initial position. Thus, in a sentence containing multiple *wa*-phrases, it is predicted that only the left-most *wa*-phrase behaves like a topic. I will demonstrate that this is indeed true.

The rest of the paper is organised as follows. Section 2 investigates the general distribution of topics in Japanese, where the predictions in (1) are also shown to be

generally borne out in this language. I will argue that topics must in fact always appear in clause-initial position, a more restricted distribution than is suggested by (1). Section 3 is concerned with the well-known observation that topics can be associated with a position inside an island (Kuno 1973, Saito 1985). It is shown there that only topic *wa*-phrases display such a characteristic and not discourse anaphoric *wa*-phrases. Post-focal *wa*-phrases behave on a par with discourse anaphoric *wa*-phrases in this respect. Using the characteristics of topic *wa*-phrases identified in Sections 2 and 3, Section 4 shows that only the left-most *wa*-phrase in a sequence of multiple *wa*-phrases is the topic. Section 5 discusses implications of the findings reported here for a theory of the syntax-information structure interface. In particular, I will argue that the observations are difficult to capture under what is commonly known as the cartographic approach (e.g., Rizzi 1997, 2004, Belletti 2004), in which discourse-related information is explicitly represented in the syntax and discourse anaphoric items are often treated as topics. In Section 6, I note some puzzling contrasts between subject and object *wa*-phrases with respect to their interpretation and offer some suggestions. Section 7 concludes the paper.

2 The distribution of topics

There are certain discourse contexts in which an item must be interpreted as a topic. For instance, a request such as *tell me about X* forces *X* to be interpreted as a topic in the following utterance (Reinhart 1981). *X* here is often referred to as an ‘aboutness’ topic. In Japanese, in responding to such a request, the item *X* must be marked with *wa* and appear in a left-peripheral position (‘thematic’ *wa*-phrase in Kuno’s (1973) terminology). The point is demonstrated below. Here, a request about a particular dog, *sono inu* ‘that dog’, is being made. (4a), in which *sono inu-wa* ‘that dog-wa’ appears in clause-initial position, is felicitous, while (4b), in which the *wa*-phrase occupies a non-clause-initial position, is infelicitous.

- (3) *sono inu-nituiteosiete-kudasai*
 that dog-about tell-please
 ‘Tell me about that dog.’
- (4) a. *sono inu-wa kinoo kooen-de John-o kande-simatta*
 that dog-wa yesterday park-at John-acc bite-closed
- b. # *John_i-o sono inu-wa kinoo kooen-de t_i kande-simatta*
 John-acc that dog-wa yesterday park-at bite-closed
 ‘The dog bit John in the park yesterday.’

(4b) is not ungrammatical, as shown by the acceptability of the same example in (2b). Although *John-o* is stressed in the latter and not in the former, the lack of

stress on the object is unlikely to be the source of infelicity, as it is possible in Japanese to A-scramble object to a position in front of the subject without placing a stress on it (Tada 1993, Saito 1992, Ishihara 2001). This characteristic is often noted for sentences where the subject bears the nominative case marker *ga*. However, it is also possible when the subject is a *wa*-phrase. The utterance in (6) is a well-formed response to (5). Here, the object is unstressed and the fact that it can bind into the subject *wa*-phrase shows that it has undergone A-scrambling.

- (5) [Mary-to Bill]_i-o [otagai_i -no sensee]-ga hometa no?
 Mary-and Bill-acc each other-gen teacher-nom praised Q
 Lit.: 'Did each other's teachers praise Mary and Bill?'
- (6) Iya, [Mary-to Bill]_i-o [otagai_i -no sensee]-wa sikatta rasii.
 No, Mary-and Bill-acc each other-gen teacher-wa told.off seem
 Lit.: 'No, it seems that each other's teachers told off Mary and Bill.'

Exactly the same observation obtains if the object is to be interpreted as an aboutness topic. As (8) shows, the object, about which a request is made in (7), must appear with *wa* and in a left-peripheral position. The nature of the empty category in (8a) will be discussed in the next section.

- (7) sono boosi-nituite osiete-kudasai
 that hat hat-about tell-please
 'Tell me about that hat.'
- (8) a. sono boosi_i-wa John-ga kinoo e_i kaimasita
 that hat-wa John-nom yesterday bought
 b. #John-ga sono boosi-wa kinoo kaimasita¹
 John-nom that hat-wa yesterday bought
 'John bought that hat.'

Items usually referred to as contrastive topics, namely those that generally bear B-accent in languages such as English and German (Jackendoff 1972, Büring 1997, 2003 and references in the latter) display comparable behaviour. Typical functions of contrastive topics include introducing a new topic of discourse, narrowing down the referent of a topic or shifting the topic from one item to another. Contrastive topics in Japanese are marked with *wa* and carry a heavy stress (Kuno 1973, among

¹ For reasons unknown to me, it appears that an object *wa*-phrase does not easily sit adjacent to a verb. Throughout the paper, adverbials are inserted between object and verb to avoid this effect. I assume following Neeleman & Reinhart (1998), that a structure in which an argument has scrambled across an adverbial can be base-generated, hence the absence of an empty position below the adverbial in (8b). This does not affect the discussion in the main text.

others, cf. Kuroda 2005). It turns out that they too must appear in a left peripheral position. In the following discourse, information in relation to John is requested in (9). Not knowing the relevant information regarding John, a speaker may provide information with respect to Bill, as in (10). In doing so, he has shifted the topic of discourse from John to Bill, making *Bill-wa* a contrastive topic.² As demonstrated by the contrast between (10a) and (10b), *Bill-wa* cannot follow the fronted object *mame-o* ‘beans-acc’.

- (9) John-wa/ga kinoo-no party-de nani-o tabeta no?
 John-wa/nom yesterday-gen party-atwhat-acc ate Q
 ‘what did John eat at the party yesterday?’
- (10) Hmm, John-wa doo-ka sira-nai-kedo,
 well, John-top how-whether know-not-but,
 ‘Well, I don’t know about John, but...’
- a. BILL-WA 8-zi-goro MAME-O tabeteita (yo)
 Bill-nom 8 o’clock-around beans-acc eating particle
- b. #MAME_i-O BILL-WA 8-zi-goro t_i tabeteita (yo)
 beans-acc Bill-wa 8 o’clock-around eating particle
 ‘As for Bill, he was eating beans around 8 o’clock.’

Similarly, where the object introduces a new topic as in (12), it must precede the subject.

- (11) 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?’
- (12) 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)
 Bill-nombeans-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.’

The examples in (9)-(12) demonstrate that the predictions in (1) are generally borne out in Japanese. In particular, (10b) shows that a topic cannot follow a fronted focus, but a fronted topic can precede a focus, as in (12b). However, it is obvious that the distribution of topics is much more restricted than the schema in

² The set-up of the context is due to Neeleman & van de Koot (to appear).

(1) suggest. (12a) shows that a topic cannot follow a focus that is in-situ, and (4b) and (8b) illustrate that a topic cannot even follow a non-focus argument.

The general view in the literature is that aboutness topics must appear sentence-initially, but contrastive topics need not (Heycock to appear and references therein, but cf. Watanabe 2003). As the examples in (10) and (12) clearly demonstrate however, contrastive *wa*-phrases must also appear clause-initially in cases they are interpreted as topics. I propose therefore that a topic *wa*-phrase, contrastive or non-contrastive, must appear in clause-initial position, but a non-topical *wa*-phrase need not.^{3,4} I formulate the claim as a constraint in (13), where *YP-wa* is a topic.

- (13) Topic *wa*-phrases
* XP YP-*wa*

One consequence of the above constraint is that a post-focal *wa*-phrase, such as the one in (2b), cannot be a topic. So, what is it? A difference between (2), where a *wa*-phrase can appear post-focally, and (4), in which the same sentence is infelicitous, is that in the latter, the context forces the statement to be about the item marked by *wa*. In (2), on the other hand, it is merely mentioned in the preceding question and there is no sense in which the responses are forced to be about the *wa*-phrase. I conclude therefore that an unstressed *wa*-phrase that can appear in a post-focal position is simply discourse anaphoric and not a topic.

The constraint also predicts that there can only be one topic per clause, as there is only one clause-initial position. I will return to this prediction in Section 4, where it is shown to be correct.

Note that with a constraint such as the one in (13), the considerations in (1) seem to lose their predicative force. For instance, a sentence in which a topic follows a fronted focus, predicted to be infelicitous by (1b), can equally be ruled out by the fact that the topic is not in clause-initial position. One may therefore wonder whether the claim that there is a one-to-one mapping between syntax and information structure when there is topic / focus displacement, which led to the predictions, is relevant at all in Japanese. It indeed seems irrelevant, if the

³ It is unclear whether the constraint in (13) applies to cases in which XP is an adverbial. Thus, in (8a), for instance, an adverbial such as *yesterday* cannot precede *sono boosi-wa* 'that hat-wa'. On the other hand, in (12b), the adverbial *8-zi-goro* '8 o'clock-around' can precede *mame-wa* 'beans-wa'. I will leave this issue with adverbials for further research, maintaining for now that (13) applies generally to arguments. Moreover, I will also ignore what Kuroda (1992) calls 'mini-topics', which are *wa*-phrases that modify objects and appear in pre-object position, as they do not seem to behave on a par with the tests discussed.

⁴ Heycock (to appear) also notes with different examples involving subject *wa*-phrases that a contrastive *wa*-phrase, if sentence-initial, can function as a topic.

constraint is taken simply to be a restriction on the positioning of a topic and also a primitive in the grammar. However, if it is to be derived from other general properties of language, appealing to the idea that the sister constituent of a displaced topic is marked as the comment seems attractive. I speculate here that this particular idea may allow us to obtain a more insightful explanation for the existence of a constraint like (13) in Japanese. This language displays some properties associated with topic-prominent languages (Li & Thompson 1976). One such property is that the syntax typically reflects topic-comment structure. It follows then that a topic must appear in clause-initial position, marking its sister, namely all of the rest of the sentence, as the comment. Note that if the constraint is taken to be a primitive, the fact that the topic targets clause-initial position, as opposed to, say, a post-focal position, would have to be seen as a result of an arbitrary choice.

3 Topicalisation and island

In addition to the positions in which they can appear, there is a further syntactic difference between topic and discourse anaphoric *wa*-phrases. It concerns the structure in which they are licensed. There is consensus in the literature that aboutness topics are base-generated in a left-peripheral position, binding a *pro* internally to the clause in their thematic position, as illustrated below. Contrastive topics, on the other hand, are generally assumed to be derived by movement, based on evidence from facts involving Weak Crossover, resumptive pronouns and parasitic gaps (Hoji 1985, Saito 1985).

(14) Topic_i [IP pro_i]

This analysis explains the well-known observation that a topic can be associated with a position inside an island, such as a relative clause.⁵ Thus, in the following example, *sono sinsi* ‘that gentleman’ is interpreted as the subject inside the relative clause. The existence of the empty pronominal *pro* can be seen from the fact that it is possible to overtly realise it (Perlmutter 1972, Kuno 1973, Saito 1985).

⁵ Kuroda (1988), Sakai (1994) and Watanabe (2003) argue that topicalisation always involves movement. However, the possibility of linking to a position inside a relative clause is still considered to be a characteristic of (a construction that can feed into) topicalisation.

- (15) sono *sinsi*_i-wa [_{TP}[_{NP} \emptyset_j [_{TP} *pro* / *kare*_i-ga *e_j* *kitei*-ta] *yoo*huku]-ga
 that gentleman-Top he-nom wearing-Past suit-GA
*yogorete*i-ta.
 dirty-Past
 ‘Speaking of that gentleman, the suit (he) was wearing was dirty.’
 (modified from Kuno (1973: 249))

If the structure in (14) is associated with ‘topics’ rather than *wa*-phrases in general, which is in line with the claim in (13), then we predict a contrast between topic *wa*-phrases and discourse anaphoric *wa*-phrases. It should be possible for a topic *wa*-phrase, but not a discourse anaphoric *wa*-phrase, to be associated with a position inside a relative clause. The prediction is borne out. In responding to the request regarding *sono kodomo* ‘that child’ in (16), *sono kodomo-wa* ‘that child-wa’ can indeed be associated with a position inside a relative clause, as in (17).

- (16) sono *kodomo*-nituite *osiete*-kudasai.
 that child-about tell-please
 ‘Tell me about that child.’
- (17) sono *kodomo*_i-wa *kyoo* [_{NP} [_{TP} *pro*/*kare*_i-ga *e_j* *kinoo* *katta*] *inu*_j]-ga
 that child-wa today he-nom yesterday bought dog-nom
 John-o *kande*-simatta.
 John-acc bite-closed
 ‘As for that child, the dog that (he) bought yesterday bit John today.’

By contrast, as an answer to the question in (18), which merely mentions *sono kodomo* ‘that child’, the same sentence is infelicitous, as illustrated in (19).

- (18) [_{NP} [_{TP} *sono kodomo*-ga *e_j* *kinoo* *katta*] *inu*_j]-ga *dare*-o *kanda* no?
 that child-nom yesterday bought dog-nom who-acc bit Q
 ‘Who did the dog that the child bought yesterday bite?’
- (19) #*sono kodomo*_i-wa *kyoo* [_{NP} [_{TP} *pro*/*kare*_i-ga *e_j* *kinoo* *katta*] *inu*_j]-ga/wa
 that child-wa today he-nom yesterday bought dog-nom/wa
 JOHN-O *kande*-simatta.
 John-acc bite-closed
 ‘The dog that the child bought yesterday bit John today.’

If all *wa*-phrases were topics and licensed uniformly in the syntax as in (14), their distribution in the syntax should not differ.

The above syntactic difference predicts furthermore that if a *wa*-phrase following a fronted focus is indeed a discourse anaphoric item, as I have argued it is in the previous section, then it should be impossible for it to be construed as an argument

inside a relative clause. The prediction is borne out. The sentence in (20) is plainly infelicitous, regardless of whether it follows the request in (16) or (18).

- (20) #JOHN_k-O sono kodomo_i-wa kooen-de [_{NP}[_{TP} pro_i e_j kinoo katta]
 John-acc that child-wa park-at yesterday bought
 inu_j]-ga t_k kada.
 dog-nom bit
 ‘The dog that this child bought yesterday bit John in the park.’

Crucially, the example becomes acceptable if the *wa*-phrase preceded the fronted focus *John-o*, as demonstrated by (21), allowing the *wa*-phrase to be interpreted as a topic. An appropriate preceding request would be (16).

- (21) sono kodomo_i-wa JOHN_k-O kooen-de [_{NP}[_{TP} pro_i e_j kinoo katta]
 that child-wa John-acc park-at yesterday bought
 inu_j]-ga t_k kada.
 dog-nom bit

In sum, there are clear syntactic differences between topic *wa*-phrases and discourse anaphoric *wa*-phrases. The former, but not the latter, must occupy clause-initial position and can be associated with a position inside an island.

4 One topic per clause

I now turn to the prediction that follows from the constraint in (13) that there can be only one topic in a clause. It has often been noted that a clause in Japanese may contain multiple *wa*-phrases. Such clauses may contain multiple contrastive *wa*-phrases, but sound awkward with more than one non-contrastive *wa*-phrase (Kuno 1973, Tomioka 2007 and Heycock to appear, cf. Kuroda 1988). In the following examples, the object *Bill-wa* carries a heavy stress and is interpreted contrastively, while the subject *sono inu-wa* ‘that dog-wa’ is not stressed and does not imply any contrast.⁶ The order between the two arguments can be reversed.

⁶ Although most authors referred to in the main text use examples with one argument *wa*-phrase and one adverbial *wa*-phrase, the generalisation holds also of two argument *wa*-phrases. Kuno (1973: 48) cites examples with two argument *wa*-phrases.

- (22) a. sono inu-wa BILL-WA moo sudeni kyonen kandeiru.
 that dog-wa Bill-wa already last.year bite-perf.
 b. BILL_i-WA sono inu-wa moo sudeni kyonen t_i kandeiru.
 Bill-wa that dog-wa already last.year bite-perf.
 ‘That dog has already bitten Bill last year.’

Given the constraint in (13), it should be impossible for both of the *wa*-phrases in (22a) or (22b) to be topics. More specifically, only the left-most *wa*-phrase in each example should display the characteristics we identified to be of topic *wa*-phrases in Sections 2 and 3.

The prediction is borne out. Firstly, in the discourse contexts that force a *wa*-phrase to be a topic, discussed in Section 2, the relevant *wa*-phrase must appear clause-initially. Thus, the request in (3), repeated below as (23), forces *sono inu* ‘that dog’ to be interpreted as the topic in the following utterance. As shown in (24), *sono inu-wa* ‘that dog-wa’ must precede the other *wa*-phrase *Bill-wa*.

- (23) sono inu-nituite osiete-kudasai
 that dog-about tell-please
 ‘Tell me about that dog.’
- (24) a. sono inu-wa BILL-WA moo sudeni kyonen kandeiru. (=22a)
 that dog-wa Bill-wa already last.year bite-perf.
 b. #BILL_i-WA sono inu-wa moo sudeni kyonen t_i kandeiru. (=22b)
 Bill-wa that dog-wa already last.year bite-perf.

Similarly, in the context provided in (25)/(26), where *Bill-wa* is interpreted as a contrastive topic, it must occupy clause-initial position, as illustrated by the contrast in (26).

- (25) sono inu-wa/ga John-o kanda no?
 that dog-wa/nom John-acc bit Q
 ‘Did that dog bite John?’
- (26) 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. #sono inu-wa BILL-WA moo sudeni kyonen kandeiru. (=22a)
 that dog-wa Bill-wa already last.year bite-perf.
 b. BILL_i-WA sono inu-wa moo sudeni kyonen t_i kandeiru. (=22b)
 Bill-wa that dog-wa already last.year bite-perf.

While providing support for the constraint in (13), the above observations also suggest that the non-clause-initial *wa*-phrases in the felicitous (24a) and (26b) must

be something other than topics. For reasons discussed in Section 2, I believe that the unstressed *wa*-phrase *sono inu-wa* ‘that dog-*wa*’ in (26b) is a discourse anaphoric item. On the other hand, the use of *wa* on a stressed object in-situ to indicate contrast, as on *Bill* in (24a), is widely discussed in the literature (Kuroda 1965, 2003, Kuno 1973, Saito 1985, Hoji 1985, Hara 2006, Tomioka 2007, Heycock to appear, among others). Particularly remarkable are the facts that the particle forces a contrastive interpretation on the object and it can project to generate VP-contrast. Thus, (24a) has the implicature that the dog has not yet bitten someone else, or has not yet committed any other violent act. I will not discuss the properties of this contrastive *wa* here. For the purpose of demonstrating that there can be only one topic per clause, it suffices to show that a stressed *wa*-phrase in non-clause-initial position is not a topic. If it is to be interpreted as a topic, it must appear in clause-initial position, as in the examples in (26) and also (12).⁷

Data involving relative clauses further confirm the claim that there can be only one topic per clause. The prediction is that an unstressed *wa*-phrase cannot be interpreted as an argument inside a relative clause if it follows a contrastive *wa*-phrase, but it can be if it precedes the contrastive *wa*-phrase. If it follows the contrastive *wa*-phrase, it cannot be a topic, but must be a discourse anaphoric *wa*-phrase, which does not have the privilege to be associated with a position inside a relative clause. The following example shows this is true. *Sono onnanoko* ‘that girl’ is intended to be construed as the subject of *katteiru* ‘have’ in the relative clause, but the sentence is not acceptable.

- (27) #BILL_k-WA sono onnanoko_i-wa [_{NP} [_{TP} pro_i e_j katteiru] inu_j]-ga kinoo
 Bill-wa that girl-wa have dog-nom yesterday
 t_k kande-simtta.
 bite-closed
 ‘As for Bill_j, and as for that girl_i, the dog that she_i has bit him_j.’

⁷ Some authors do in fact refrain from using the term ‘contrastive topic’ when referring to non-clause-initial stressed *wa*-phrases. Instead, they call such use of *wa* as ‘contrastive *wa*’ (Kuno 1973, Hara 2006, Kuroda 2005, among others).

On the other hand, if *Bill-wa* stays in-situ, allowing *sono onnanoko-wa* ‘that girl-wa’ to occupy clause-initial position, the sentence becomes acceptable.⁸

- (28) sono onnanoko_i-wa [_{NP} [_{TP} pro_i e_j katteiru] inu_j]-ga BILL-WA kinoo
 that girl-wa have dog-nom Bill-wa yesterday
 kande simtta.
 bite-closed

The data considered in this section show clearly that there can be only one topic in a clause, lending further support to the claim that a topic must appear in clause-initial position.

5 How much information structure is in syntax?

In this section, I discuss implications of the above findings for a theory of the interface between syntax and information structure. Neeleman & van de Koot (to appear) view the schema in (1) as templates that constrain the mapping between syntax and information structure. If the topic moves in the syntax, the constituent that is the sister to the moved topic is interpreted as its comment, while if the focus moves, the constituent that is the sister to the moved focus is interpreted as its background. The point is illustrated in (29). These mapping rules are not associated with particular functional projections or positions in the syntactic structure. An item that is to be interpreted as focus, for instance, may undergo movement to an adjoined position internally to IP. Following Neeleman & van de Koot, I will call this the flexible approach.

⁸ It is interesting to note that if the contrastive *wa*-phrase, *BILL-WA*, is fronted to a position following *sono onnanoko-wa* ‘that girl-wa’, as in (i), the sentence is infelicitous. The discussion in the main text suggests that this sentence should in fact be acceptable with *sono onnanoko-wa* being interpreted as an aboutness topic and *Bill-wa* as simply contrastive as in (22a)/(24a).

- (i) #sono onnanoko_i-wa BILL_k-WA [_{NP} [_{TP} pro_i e_j katteiru] inu_j]-ga kinoo t_k kande simtta.
 that girl-wa Bill-wa have dog-nom yesterday bite-closed

Considering that movement requires motivation, it seems reasonable to assume that a *wa*-phrase moves in order to be interpreted as a topic, by moving to TopP à la Rizzi (1997), for instance. In (i), *Bill-wa* has undergone movement, and should therefore be a topic, but it is not in clause-initial position, as required by (13), hence the unacceptability. See also Section 2 for motivation for topic displacement. Some speakers find (28) marginal, but report a clear contrast between (i) and (28).

not show the same behaviour as pre-focal topics, raising doubt as to whether they should be analysed as ‘topics’.

One may suggest that the post-focal Topic Phrases can perhaps be considered functional projections associated with discourse anaphoricity instead, bearing the label Disc.Ana.P, for instance. However, this move seems highly undesirable from a theoretical point of view. On the cartographic approach, particles such as *wa* have been taken as evidence for the existence of a Topic projection, *wa* being a morphological realisation of the Topic head. Admitting that *wa* can mark topic as well as discourse anaphoric items amounts to a claim that appears circular, namely that *wa* is a morphological realisation of Top⁰ only when the phrase to which it is attached is interpreted as a topic, but it is a morphological realisation of Disc.Ana⁰ if it marks a discourse anaphoric item.⁹

By contrast, the idea that the particle *wa* marks topics as well as discourse anaphoric items is more easily accommodated on the flexible approach. Under this approach, nothing forces the particle to be directly associated with a topic interpretation. What *wa* marks is a separate issue from the syntactic representation of a sentence containing a topic. A displaced item is interpreted as a topic by virtue of its sister constituent being interpreted as the comment by the discourse.

One may wonder then why *wa* marks topic at all, if topic can be identified by other means. Here, I speculate that this is to do with the fact that without the particle, it would be difficult to distinguish topicalisation from other kinds structures. Japanese does not have the phonological correlates of what Jackendoff (1972) calls A-accent and B-accent which are found in languages such as English to distinguish the interpretation of items bearing such accents: A-accent indicates focus, while B-accent (contrastive) topic (Hara 2006 and references therein).¹⁰ Consequently, a sentence containing an object aboutness topic has the same intonation as a sentence in which the object has undergone A-scrambling to a position in front of the subject (Ishihara 2001), as in (31). The pre-verbal item, the subject *John-ga*, bears the main stress in both. Similarly, a sentence in which an object is interpreted as a contrastive topic has the same intonation as a sentence with a fronted accusative object, which is interpreted as a contrastive focus, as demonstrated in (32). Here, the main stress falls on the object, with the rest of the sentence deaccented (Ishihara 2001, Tomioka 2007).

⁹ See Neeleman & van de Koot (to appear) for further arguments against positing functional projections for discourse anaphoric items.

¹⁰ Japanese does have what is known as prominence lending rise, which has some pragmatic effects (Oshima in press). However, it does not appear to systematically distinguish topic from focus (cf. Hayashishita 2007).

- (31) a. sono hon-wa John-ga yonda.
 that book-wa John-nom read
 ‘Speaking of that book, John read it.’
 b. sono hon-o John-ga yonda.
 that book-acc John-nom read
 ‘John read that book.’
- (32) a. SONO HON-WA John-ga yonda.
 that book-wa John-nom read
 ‘John read that book(, but not others).’
 b. SONO HON-O John-ga yonda.
 that book-acc John-nom read
 ‘It is that book that John read.’

Thus, while the claim that the particle *wa* can mark topics as well as discourse anaphoric items does not argue directly against a cartographic approach to the interface between syntax and information structure, it seems to fit less comfortably than in an approach where the particle is not associated with a particular functional projection in the syntax.

6 Subject – object asymmetry

Before concluding, I would like to point out a puzzling contrast between subject and object *wa*-phrases. It is widely observed that an object *wa*-phrase in-situ must bear heavy stress and be interpreted as contrastive (e.g., Saito 1985, Watanabe 2003, Tomioka 2007). Thus, in the following discourse, it is not possible to mark the object with *wa*, as in (34a), although, just like the subject in (2), it is mentioned in the preceding question (33). The discourse anaphoric object must appear instead with the accusative case marker *o*, as in (34b) (Fiengo & McClure 2002, Heycock to appear). The reply in (34a) is not completely infelicitous, but has an additional implicature that the book in question is being contrasted with another book.

- (33) Dare-ga sono hon-o katta no?
 Who-nom that book-acc bought Q
 ‘Who bought that book?’
- (34) a. #JOHN-GA sono hon-wa kinoo katta.
 John-nom that book-wa yesterday bought
 b. JOHN-GA sono hon-o kinoo katta.
 John-nom that book-acc yesterday bought

A discourse anaphoric subject, on the other hand, is awkward at best with the nominative case marker *ga* and strongly favours being marked by *wa* (Kuno 1973, Tomioka 2007):

- (35) sono inu-ga dare-o kanda no? (=2a)
 that dog-nom who-acc bit Q
- (36) sono inu-#ga/wa JOHN-O kanda.
 that dog-nom/wa John-acc bit

It is not the case that an object *wa*-phrase cannot be construed as discourse anaphoric. If the subject is a *wa*-phrase, contrastive or non-contrastive, the interpretation of an object *wa*-phrase in-situ as simply discourse anaphoric becomes much more acceptable, as shown below. The example in (38) is uttered in response to the request in (37), where the subject is already marked with *wa*. Here, the object *sono hon* ‘that book’, which is also mentioned in the request, can be marked with *wa* without giving rise to a contrast (Kawamura to appear). The context in (39)/(40), where the subject is a contrastive topic, illustrates the same point.

- (37) Mary-wa tosyokan-de sono hon-o karita no?
 Mary-wa library-at that book-acc borrowed Q
 ‘Did Mary borrow that book in the library?’
- (38) Ie, Mary-wa sono hon-wa kekkyoku honya-de KAIMASITA.
 No, Mary-wa that book-wa in.the.end book.shop-at bought
 ‘No, Mary bought the book in the end at the bookshop.’
- (39) John-wa sono hon-o kekkyoku ka-eta no?
 John-wa that book-acc in.the.end buy-could Q
 ‘Did John manage to buy that book?’
- (40) Hmm, John-wa doo-ka sira-nai-kedo,
 well, John-wa how-whether know-not-but
 BILL-WA sono hon-wa denwa-de tyuumon-simasita.
 Bill-wa that book-wa phone-by ordered
 ‘Well, I don’t know about John, but Bill ordered the book by phone.’

At present, I have no insightful explanation for the contrast between subject and object, illustrated in (33)-(36), or for the parasitic nature of object *wa*-phrases shown in (37)-(40). Following Tomioka (2007), I speculate that an account at least of the former observation may be found in the differences in the interpretations available to nominative subjects and accusative objects. A nominative subject disallows a discourse anaphoric interpretation, while an accusative object allows it.

A discourse anaphoric subject must therefore be marked with *wa*, while a discourse anaphoric object need not be.¹¹ One must of course still explain why there is such a contrast between nominative subjects and accusative objects. I will leave investigation of this contrast as well as the parasitic nature of object *wa*-phrases for future research.

7 Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to show that the particle *wa* does not only mark topic. It can also mark discourse anaphoric items. There is clear evidence that discourse anaphoric *wa*-phrases have a distinct syntactic distribution from topic *wa*-phrases, suggesting that the two types of *wa*-phrases should not be treated alike in the syntax. I claimed further that a topic must always appear in clause-initial position, but a discourse anaphoric *wa*-phrase need not. The prediction that followed from this claim that there can be no more than one topic per clause, was also shown to be supported by data involving multiple *wa*-phrases.

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¹¹ Tomioka claims that the possibility of *wa*-marking the subject is determined by what interpretations are available to the subject if it is marked by the nominative case marker *ga*. For instance, a nominative subject must be interpreted as indefinite in a matrix clause, while it need not be in an embedded clause (Kuno 1973). Consequently, he argues, the subject in a matrix clause must be marked by *wa* if it is to be interpreted as definite, but not in an embedded clause.

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